

# BRIARCLIFF QUARTERLY

CONTEMPORARY

ITALIAN LITERATURE

12

SIXTY-FIVE CENTS

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## NOTES

BECAUSE of prohibitive publishing costs, the result of inflation, the administration of Briarcliff Junior College does not contemplate the continued sponsorship of the *Briarcliff Quarterly* beyond the appearance of Number Fourteen. Two more issues of the magazine will be distributed during the coming academic year in order to fulfill unexpired subscriptions, but no new subscriptions will be accepted. Founded as the *Maryland Quarterly* by the students in *Norman Macleod's* class in creative writing at the University of Maryland, the magazine was brought to Briarcliff by Mr. Macleod in the fall of 1944. Then for the first time in educational history an advance-guard magazine was produced in an American college through the agency of class and extra-curricular activity. This ITALIAN NUMBER is the last issue that will be produced at Briarcliff under the direction of *Norman Macleod*. After conclusion of the spring semester at Briarcliff, Mr. Macleod will go to Columbia, Missouri, where from June 8 through June 18 he will serve as conference leader at the University of Missouri Writers Conference. From there he will proceed to the Ohio State University at Columbus, where he will teach creative writing and contemporary literature.

A broadcast to Belgium on October 3, 1946, on the subject of the *Briarcliff Quarterly*, was made by M. Jan-Albert Goris, Commissioner of Information for Belgium in the United States. The lead article in the August, 1946, issue of *Junior Bazaar* was entitled "Briarcliff Quarterly."

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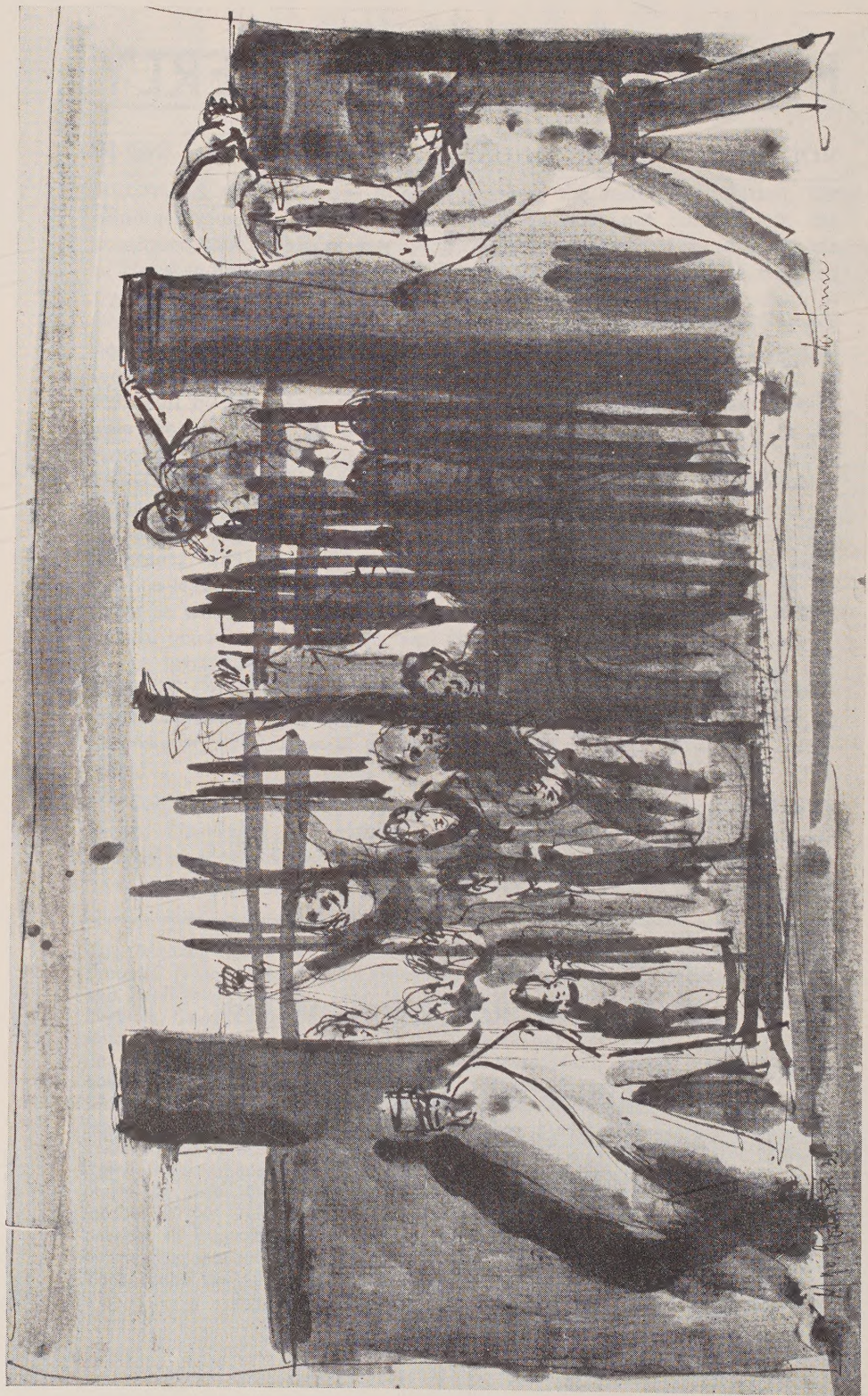
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THE CLOSED GATE (1933)



# BRIARCLIFF QUARTERLY

## INTERNATIONAL LITERARY REVIEW

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### Number Twelve

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#### ITALIAN LITERATURE BETWEEN TWO WARS

In the years preceding and following the first world war Italian literature witnessed the disappearance from the stage of all the great names of the generation of the grand-fathers. The great-grand-father, Giosuè Carducci, after having survived his glory, died in 1907. Of his two spiritual sons, Pascoli died in 1912; D'Annunzio published *Notturmo*, his last work of some importance, in the early twenties. Their *epigones* were soon forgotten. In the twenties died the only great novelist of Italian naturalism or *verismo*, Giovanni Verga, whose work, appreciated too late, showed as a compensation a greater ability to influence the writers of the younger generation. Even greater was the effectiveness (in criticism) of the wide and rich teaching of Benedetto Croce, although the writers influenced by him expressed forms and ideals that, without disagreeing with his aesthetic theory, didn't agree with the critical taste and the practical lesson of the master. The period then beginning seemed destined to be largely fallow after the rich literary crop at the end of the preceding and the beginning of the present century, when with the conferring of the Nobel Prize on Carducci and the Parisian triumphs of D'Annunzio Italian literature had broken its not too splendid isolation of the last three centuries. But the silence was interrupted for a while by the noisy European success of the dramas of another, future Nobel Prize winner, Luigi Pirandello, who achieved with his plays and their rather obvious philosophical relativism a reputation which was far worthier of the stories he had written in his youth and maturity, through which he has shown himself to be an original successor of Verga.

The years after the war spelt the liquidation of literary advance-guardism: the Futurists, who had made European literary history almost exclusively through their scandalous exhibitionism and the felicitous advertising qualities of the name of their movement, were spiritually dead: those among them who survived themselves were destined to become, also politically, the standard-bearers of a strange brand of academicism and reaction. A greater vitality seemed to lie in that group of bohemian writers, both encyclopedic and amateurish, who gathered for

a few years around the Florentine review *La Voce*: the best known among them, Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici, fated to get back into the fold of traditional Catholicism, plebeian conservatism and Fascist provincialism, were also bound to reveal that their gifts had been purely rhetorical or verbal. Of the few serious minds among or around them, some, like the Triestino Scipio Slataper, or the fine critic and humanist Renato Serra, died on the battlefield; others retired into dignified silence, like the Protestant Piero Jahier, who had sung in tune with the popular songs of the mountaineers he had led as an officer in Alpine fighting.

The *Voce* movement had been defined as a belated Italian *Sturm und Drang*; Futurism had been nothing else but a manifestation of artistic nihilism and hooliganism. The only advance-guard movement which was later capable of resurgence from the ashes of literary rebellion was the so-called *Novecento*, which flourished in the late twenties and early thirties, with far richer results in the field of fine arts than in the field of literature, in spite of the fact that its founder, theorist and leading personality was a storyteller, Massimo Bontempelli. The only merit of that movement, which proclaimed the necessity of a magic and poetic interpretation of the material wonders of urbane life and the machine world, was its modernistic and European opposition to the self-glorifying cultural backwardness and intellectual obscurantism of a small group of self-styled Fascist writers, who celebrated the so-called *Italia Barbara*, a pseudo-popular version of the reactionary tradition of Italian cultural history after the Counter-Reformation.

While this group represented the tendencies of an authentic cultural involution, the animating spirit of the literary currents which, without being responsible for them, made possible the theories of that group, had been an ideal of restoration. Italy had been the first European country to sound what Cocteau called later a *rappel à l'ordre*. This attempt to restore permanent literary values had been achieved by the Roman review *La Ronda*, which in the early twenties had expounded the theory and practise of an enlightened twentieth-century neoclassicism, based not so much on the creative example, as on the stylistic doctrines of Giacomo Leopardi. This neoclassicism was to a certain extent a healthy development, since it taught a lesson of formal discipline, of intellectual clarity, of restraint but not of renunciation in the field of the imagination. This was done without resorting to erudition, archeology and pedanticism: and the limitations of the school consisted rather in the narrowness of the vision of the *Rondisti*. Their leader, Vincenzo Cardarelli, an elegant writer in prose and verse, raised to the dignity of accomplished form that kind of lyrical fragmentism and impressionistic "illuminations" which had triumphed earlier among the writers of the *Voce* group. Among his collaborators, one may remember the names of Riccardo Bacchelli, destined to become the author of ambitious historical frescoes,



of the *roman-fleuve* entitled *Il Mulino del Po*; Antonio Baldini, an exquisite stylist and sceptic, and cynical in a rather innocent vein, who brought to perfection the *elzeviro*, the leading article of that literary section which is an exclusive institution of Italian daily journalism, and which is called *terza pagina*; Emilio Cecchi, connoisseur of the plastic arts and of nineteenth century English literature, who applied the critical method to the substance of invention and the imagination, and the caprice of fancy to the essay or the critique. Cecchi became the master of a kind of cultivated phantasies which from the title of one of his collections were called *pesci rossi*, "gold fishes."

The effort of the *Rondisti* was to find a common denominator between modern continental fashions and the Italian literary tradition. In a certain sense they were minor but perfect masters: in the history of modern Italian letters they occupy a place similar to that which belongs to the Flemish painters of still-lives or domestic scenes in the history of painting. They didn't achieve nor seek outside recognition, not even a wide Italian success. The only author who was able to secure European recognition in their time, was the Trieste writer Italo Svevo, who in real life was the businessman Ettore Schmitz. Svevo died a few years after his old friend James Joyce, who, with the help of a group of Parisian critics, had revealed to the literary intelligentsia of the continent Svevo's second important novel, *La Coscienza di Zeno*. Svevo was certainly a greater master than his far more successful contemporaries, all *epigones* of nineteenth century literature. The foremost among them had been perhaps Alfredo Panzini, the nostalgic representative of *fin du siècle* culture, a vulgarizer of traditional Italian humanism, who adapted not without some graceful irony the lessons of Carducci's classicism to the standards of taste of the Italian middle class.

Practically no writer of any one of the three generations living and working at that time foresaw the approaching storm. The only exception was perhaps Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, the most brilliant and respected critic of his generation, who in his novel *Rubé* described powerfully, within the psyche of his protagonist, that failure of Italian conscience that finally led to the mad adventure of Fascism. On the other hand, it is equally true that after its appearance very few Italian writers paid tribute to the new political monster. However, one must recognize that this was due as much to political indifference as to an instinctive repulsion of the heart and the intellect. Fascism tried hard to conquer the Italian intelligence with the mirage of state patronage; and it is only fair to state that only a few second-rate talents yielded to that temptation. For these reasons, the influence of Fascism on literature and culture was effective only indirectly; it increased even more the customary literary individualism and aesthetic narcissism of the Italian writer. This produced the paradoxical consequence that for almost twenty years the

only really popular authors in Italy were foreigners, either French, generally read in their native tongue, or Anglo-American and Russian, widely known through a rich and good crop of translations, which even Fascist censorship was unable to check, except, after the establishment of the antisemitic laws, in the case of Jewish authors.

The literary forms which suffered most from this state of affairs were the drama, which practically disappeared after Pirandello; and fiction, which produced a prose more lyrical or decorative than narrative, or novels and short stories cultivating almost exclusively the rather small gardens of local experience and regional life. Some authors seemed to gain in depth what they were losing in extension: such was perhaps the case with three Tuscans, the late Federigo Tozzi, who however died in the early twenties, and who described powerfully the tragedy of the human soul caught in the net of provincial isolation and meanness; Enrico Pea, whose work is at the same time autobiographical and symbolical, and blends poetically the idiosyncrasies of the individual mind with naive superstitions, popular mysticism and the folklore of his native Versilia; Aldo Palazzeschi, who had started as a poet and as a Futurist, but in a rather phantastic vein, and who later acquired fame with his Florentine characters and sketches, and a penetrating novel of middle class life, *Le Sorelle Materassi*.

Among those authors who conceived of narrative prose as a variant of poetry and lyricism, one may cite Gianna Manzini, the outstanding Italian woman writer of today, as cerebral as Virginia Woolf and as tender as Katherine Mansfield; Giovan Battista Angioletti, a storyteller more interested in atmosphere and background than in characterization and plot; Arturo Loria, a master of the picturesque and the picaresque; Alessandro Bonsanti, who evokes the outmoded world of the past century with the neatness of an old-fashioned engraving; Tommaso Landolfi, who fancifully blends the humorous and the grotesque.

The only two writers who used fiction as an instrument of perception and vision rather than as pretext for morbid rêveries or nostalgic remembrances of things past were Alberto Moravia (Alberto Pincherle) and Corrado Alvaro. The former, who is, perhaps rightly so, the most widely read Italian novelist of today, has shown great gifts of observation and characterization. A great painter of manners, he has fully and cynically represented the intellectual decay and the moral corruption of the Roman bourgeoisie. The latter, who had started as an idyllic interpreter of the pastoral life of his native Calabria, was later able to evoke, even if in a rather vague and too symbolical manner, the historical tragedy of totalitarianism in his novel *L'Uomo è Forte*, which the wishful thinking Fascist censorship too easily considered as a condemnation of communist collectivism. Such a consciousness of the realities of Italian and European life were never lacking in the scarce but interesting literary writings of



the *émigrés*, as for instance in the novels of Ignazio Silone (Secondo Tranquilli), especially in *Fontamara*, a tragical and farcical picture of the silent fight waged by the Southern peasant mind against Fascist oppression, injustice and stupidity, in the half-real and half-imaginary village of that name. It was not accidental that the only important dramatic work which appeared in Italian literature after Pirandello was written in exile, and originally, in French, by the late Leo Ferrero. That play, *Angelica*, is a poetic and symbolic satire of Fascism, with puppet-like characters almost exclusively drawn from the gallery of the fixed types or "masks" of the ancient *Commedia dell'Arte*. It is too bad that the Italian public was able to become acquainted with works of this kind only after the liberation, one or two years ago.

Under Fascism, the traditional primacy of poetry was even more absolute than usual. In this field the permanent values of the great Italian lyrical tradition were able to survive and to renew themselves through a free, intelligent and original reinterpretation of the most recent tendencies of European and especially French poetry, or the rereading of old masters revived by the revolutions or involutions of poetic taste. The models were Baudelaire and Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Valéry, the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*, Petrarch and Tasso, Foscolo and Leopardi, Góngora and Donne, Blake and Hölderlin; among the very young, even García Lorca and Esenin. The forerunner of contemporary Italian lyrical modernism was considered Dino Campana, who died a few years ago in an insane asylum, but whose only book of poems, *Canti Orfici*, had been published in 1914.

The leading Italian poet of today, Giuseppe Ungaretti, after having begun his career in France, passed through the early adventures of Italian and French advance-guardism; and after having published in *Allegria di Naufragi* a book of poetic "illuminations" as neat and pure as the Chinese and Japanese poets he had read, he found his more mature inspiration during the epoch of the *Ronda*, when he wrote those *Inni* which constitute the most important nucleus of his greatest collection up to today, *Sentimento del Tempo*. Growing in stature with time, Ungaretti is now a poet able to evoke, with the splendid simplicity of a magic language, the eternal realities of death and life, of love and sorrow, of the spirit and the flesh. The world of the oldest among the great living poets of Italy, Umberto Saba, is the same as Ungaretti's, but relived through a more directly autobiographical experience, seen not through splendid and eternal symbols, but in the daily chronicle of life, evoked with proselike serenity and tender pathos in a kind of poetic diary, which the poet has entitled, simply and classically, *Canzoniere*. While Ungaretti and Saba are the poets of a cosmic and human harmony, Eugenio Montale sings with a dissonant voice the disharmonies of the condition of the universe and of the condition of man. A poet of powerful

originality, Montale sees creation as a desert and devastated landscape, life a moon-like surface from which there stand out the scattered remains of life and the ruins of the soul. The form of his poetry is twisted and tortured, in hidden but deep agreement with his tormented inspiration, with the dry lucidity of his vision.

A less well known but equally authentic poet, sometimes sunny like Ungaretti, sometimes arid like Montale, Salvatore Quasimodo, has recently shown himself able to follow a more literal and immediate inspiration, and has masterfully translated the glorious fragments of the melic poets of ancient Greece. Some of the poets of the younger generation seem to follow Ungaretti and Quasimodo, as for instance Leonardo Sinigalli and Libero de Libero; others, like Alfonso Gatto and Mario Luzi, have learned their poetic lesson also in Montale; or in Saba, as has Sandro Penna. The very youngest are following instead a different path: the tragic experience of the war has filled their poetry with strong choral accents, with social and political echoes, as in the case of Tommaso Giglio and Vittorio Sereni.

Something similar has happened to quite a few prose writers of the generation which came to the fore during the years of the war. The ambition to create a form of fiction worthy of the most valid European experiments and at the same time rooted in the consciousness of the tragic realities of Italian life promises to be highly successful. Never has Italian fiction seemed to be so lively, original and flourishing as in the last few years. War and defeat, the agony of the people and the fall of the hated regime, starvation and destruction, persecution and death, the national regeneration through the underground struggle and the partisan movement, the resurgence of old despairs and the rising of new hopes, all this seems to have given a new lease of life to Italian fiction. The names and the titles are too many to be quoted. We shall cite only two novels of Elio Vittorini, *Conversazione in Sicilia* and *Uomini e No*. In the former, under the fiction of a trip back to his native island by the protagonist, the author evokes a gallery of figures all longing for a more just and ideal social order, wanting to raise to a state of dignity the condition of man, in such a way as to deceive at first Fascist censorship, but not the keen insight of foreign observers, who in the translations of that novel recognized a poetic indictment of Fascism, a voice raised in protest against the oppression of man by man. In the second novel, written about a year ago, through the invocation of the underground struggle of the Milanese people against the Fascist tyrant and the German invader, the author was again able to give a highly moving and poetic glorification of mankind. In works of this kind Italian letters would seem to have learned that the green tree of literary culture grows only where the writer speaks for something higher than art itself.

—RENATO POGGIOLI



Italo Svevo  
HEADY WINE

A niece of my wife was to be married, at an age when she had left her girlhood behind her and was nearly a spinster. Until only a short time before she had turned her back on life, but pressure from the family finally broke down her resistance. She gave up her yearning for purity and religion and decided to go steady with a young man whom her parents considered a good match. Soon it was farewell religion and goodbye dreams of chaste isolation; the date set for the wedding was even earlier than her parents wished. Now we were all at supper together on the wedding eve.

Old rake that I am, I couldn't help laughing. How had the fellow got her to change her mind so quickly? Probably he had taken her in his arms and given her a taste of the joy of living; in short, he had appealed to her senses rather than to her reason. To my mind the couple really stood in need of our good wishes. All those who are on the brink of matrimony stand in such need, but my wife's niece was an extreme case. What a shame if one day she were to regret having taken the first step on a path from which she had so long hung back. I even went so far as to murmur a very special toast or two, made up on the spur of the moment, as I raised my glass:

"May you be happy for a year or so, anyhow. Then you'll be able to bear the other long years ahead a bit more easily, because you'll have the memory of your happiness. Happiness always leaves regret behind it, and this is a form of sorrow, but it serves to cover up the basic sorrow of human existence."

The bride did not appear to need our moral support. On the contrary, her face was set in an expression of confident surrender. It was the same expression she had worn when she had declared her intention of entering a convent. Now she was again making a vow, a vow to be happy for the rest of her days. Some people in this world are always making a vow of one kind or another. Would she keep this vow better than the last?

All the others at the table were uninhibitedly gay in their role of on-lookers. Not so myself. The evening was memorable to me for reasons of my own. My wife had persuaded Dr. Paoli to permit me to eat and drink like everyone else. This liberty was all the more precious because with it went a warning that I should be deprived of it again almost immediately. I was behaving just like a boy who has just been given the key of the house. I ate and drank, not because I was hungry or thirsty, but simply because I was starved for liberty; every sip and every mouthful were declarations of my independence. I opened my mouth much wider than was necessary, poured my glass full of wine until it was brimming

over and then emptied it with a gulp. I was highly restless, and although I could not budge from my chair I felt as if I were running and jumping like a dog that has just escaped from the chain.

My wife made things worse by telling her neighbor about my usual diet, while my fifteen-year old daughter Emma made herself important by supplying additional details. Was it that they wanted to make me remember my chains at the very moment I was shaking them off? They described every phase of my torture: how they weighed the little piece of meat I ate for dinner and boiled away its flavor, and how in the evening they didn't even have to weigh anything because my supper was a hard roll with a sliver of ham and a glass of warm milk with no sugar, that made me sick just to look at it. While they were chatting I inwardly condemned the doctor's science and the quality of my family's affection. If my organism was so very run down how could it tolerate such a quantity of indigestible and harmful foods on this particular evening just because we had convinced a young woman to marry against her own free will? As I drank I made plans for staging a rebellion the next day. I'd show them.

The others were drinking champagne, but after I had a few glasses of it in response to various toasts I went back to ordinary table wine, a good, dry vintage sent by a friend of the family. I cherished this wine as I did my dearest memories and had complete trust in it. I was not in the least surprised that instead of filling me with gaiety and forgetfulness it seemed merely to swell my anger.

Why shouldn't I be angry? They had put me through a very unhappy time. Because I was afraid and not myself I had given up my natural geniality for a mess of pills, powders and other prescriptions. I had relinquished even my Socialist convictions. What did it matter to me if, scientific reasoning notwithstanding, the earth was still divided up into private property? If so many men had neither the daily bread nor the ration of liberty that one and all should enjoy? Did I myself enjoy them?

\* \* \*

On this blessed evening, then, I tried to return to life. When my nephew Giovanni, a strapping fellow who weighs over two hundred pounds, began to tell in his loud way stories about how clever he was at business and how stupid were his competitors, my old altruistic philosophy came back to me.

"What's to become of you," I shouted, "when men no longer fight over money?"

For a moment Giovanni was taken aback by this meaningful question which seemed to erupt suddenly under all his preconceived notions. He stared at me with eyes enlarged by his spectacles, looking into my face for further explanation. Everyone turned toward him in hope of



enjoying some bit of repartee. Ignorant and yet quick-witted materialist that he was, he had a sense of humor, half naive and half malicious, that always came up with something surprising even if it was hoary. But he simply stalled for time, saying that although wine usually made a man's vision of the present hazy, in my case the future was clouded over. This wasn't a bad answer, but then he thought of a better one and shouted:

"When men don't fight for money then I'll have it without a fight, yes, all there is of it!"

There was considerable laughter, especially at a repeated motion of his arms which he first held out with the palms of his hands extended and then brought together, clenching his fists, as if he held in them the money which was to accrue to him from every side.

The discussion went on and no one realized that when I wasn't talking I was drinking. I drank a lot and said very little, because I was intent on studying my own insides, to see if they would finally overflow with loving-kindness. At the moment my insides were burning. But the burning was sure to change to an agreeable warmth, to a renewal of youth such as wine has a way of bringing about, if only for a brief instant. In the meantime I shouted to Giovanni:

"If you pick up the money that others will have none of, they'll throw you in jail."

But he shouted right back:

"I'll bribe my jailers and then I'll lock up the poor fools who haven't the money to bribe them."

"But money won't be a bribe to anyone."

"Why shouldn't I have it then?"

I grew angry beyond all measure.

"We'll teach you," I shouted. "You're asking for it. We'll string you up with a rope around your neck and weights on your feet."

I stopped short in astonishment. Surely this wasn't just what I meant to say. Did it sound like me? No, not at all. And I wondered how to regain my brotherly feelings toward the whole of humanity, including, no doubt, Giovanni. I smiled at him quickly, making a tremendous effort to qualify what I had said, to forgive and love him as my neighbor. But he himself stood in my way, heedless of my kindly smile and saying, as if he were resigned to awareness of some monstrosity:

"Oh well, Socialists always end up in practice as hangmen."

\* \* \*

He had won out, but I hated him. He was perverting the meaning of my whole life, even that part of it before the intrusion of the doctor, which I now looked back on with such nostalgia. He had won out simply because he voiced the very doubt that had assailed me before he spoke. And then another punishment overtook me.

"How well he looks!" said my sister, with a pointed look in my direction. Her sentence was an unhappy one because my wife, as soon as she heard it, began to think that the well-being painted all over my face might turn into a sudden relapse. She was as frightened as if someone had warned her of an imminent danger and she lit into me violently.

"Enough! Enough!" she cried out. "Put that glass away!"

And she called for the aid of the man sitting next to me, a certain Alberi, one of the tallest men in town, but very healthy in spite of his lankiness, who wore a pair of spectacles like Giovanni.

"Please take that glass away from him."

When she saw that Alberi was somewhat hesitant, her agitation grew and she insisted:

"Mr. Alberi, do oblige me by taking it away from him."

My impulse was to laugh, or rather I thought it would be the politest thing to do under the circumstances, but I couldn't seem to do it. I had planned my rebellion for the next day, and it wasn't my fault that events precipitated it. This public scolding was an outrage. Alberi, who didn't give a hang for me, my wife, or any of his hosts of the evening, made my position even more ridiculous. He peered over his spectacles at the glass in my grasp and stretched out his hands as if to snatch it from me; then he suddenly drew them back as if he were frightened by something he saw in my face. Behind my back everyone was laughing; Giovanni so hoarsely that he was out of breath.

My daughter Emma thought her mother needed support. In a voice which seemed to me unduly supplicant she said:

"Father dear, don't drink any more!"

I gave vent to my anger on this innocent girl in brutal words aroused by an old father's resentment. Her eyes filled with tears and her mother no longer paid me any attention, but turned to console her.

Just at this moment my son Ottavio, who was then thirteen, ran to his mother. He had no notion of what had happened: neither of his sister's sorrow nor of the discussion which had led up to it. All he wanted was permission to go to a cinema the following evening with some friends who had just asked him. Because she was taken up with her ministrations to Emma, my wife did not even hear him. I saw a chance to bolster up my prestige and I shouted my assent:

"Of course you can go. I say so and that's quite sufficient."

Ottavio did not linger, but returned to his friends after thanking me for my permission. It was too bad that he should go away again so quickly; if he had stayed I should have enjoyed the happiness that was his by virtue of my authority.

The general good humor of the company was temporarily disrupted and I felt guilty toward the bride whose future it was intended to light up. At the same time she seemed to me to be the only person



who really understood my feelings; she was looking at me in a motherly way as if to forgive and embrace me. The girl had always appeared quite sure of her own judgment. She was just as sure now that her decision to marry was right as she once had been that she should take the veil. At the moment she was sitting in judgment of my wife, my daughter and myself. She was sorry for us as a family and her handsome grey eyes surveyed us calmly, looking for the fatal flaw which she thought must be at the base of our discord.

I was all the angrier at my wife, whose behavior had made us all objects of pity. She had made us descend to the lowest possible level. At the other end of the table even my sister-in-law's children had stopped their chatter and were talking with their heads close together about what had happened. My fingers tightened around my glass; I was uncertain whether to empty it or to dash it against the wall or the window opposite me. Finally I drank it down. This was my most resolute action of the evening, the complete assertion of my independence, and the wine seemed to me the best I had drunk so far. I prolonged my satisfaction by filling my glass up again and sipping from it. Still happiness did not come to me; the intensity of feeling that now pervaded my whole body was one of bitterness. A strange idea came into my head. My rebellion was not enough to clear the air. Why shouldn't I ask the bride to rebel with me? Fortunately just at that very moment she smiled tenderly at the groom, sitting confidently beside her. I thought to myself: "She doesn't yet know, although she thinks she does."

I remember that Giovanni said:

"Let him drink. Wine is milk to an old man."

I looked at him, wrinkling up my face into what was meant to be a smile, but I couldn't make myself love him. I knew that all he cared about was the success of the party; he wanted to indulge me as if I were a spoiled child that had interrupted the grown-ups.

I drank less, to tell the truth, only when someone was looking at me, and I did not open my mouth. There was a cheery noise all around me which was most annoying. I was not listening to what was said but I could not escape hearing. An argument had arisen between Alberi and Giovanni and everyone was amused to see a fat man at odds with a thin one. I didn't know what it was all about, but both of them were speaking in an inflammatory manner. Alberi was standing up and leaning so far forward toward Giovanni that his spectacles were halfway across the table. Giovanni was resting his two hundred pounds on an armchair which someone had slid under him as a joke after supper, and scrutinizing his adversary like a fencer who is planning how to place his next thrust. Alberi, too, cut a fine figure, agile and yet calm, radiant with health in spite of his leanness.

I remember the interminable exchange of good wishes and greetings

when the party broke up. The bride kissed me with the same motherly smile. I received her kiss absentmindedly. I was wondering when I should be allowed to tell her something of the meaning of life.

\* \* \*

Just then someone mentioned the name of an old friend of my wife and an even older one of mine, a woman called Anna. I don't know who brought it up or why, but it was the last name I heard before the guests melted away. I had seen her frequently over a period of years in the company of my wife and we spoke to each other with the friendly indifference of two people who have no objection to having been born in the same city at the same period. Now all of a sudden I remembered that long, long ago she had been the victim of my only sentimental crime. I had courted her almost up to the time of my marriage. My betrayal was so brusque that I did not even try to excuse it, and the whole thing was quickly forgotten because very soon after she, too, married and was very happy. She had failed to come to this wedding supper merely on account of a light case of grippe which kept her in bed. Nothing serious. But it was serious and very strange that a memory of this crime should descend suddenly upon my already troubled conscience. I had a clear feeling that now I was adequately punished. From her sickbed I could hear my victim protest: "It wouldn't have been fair for you to be happy." I went to my bedroom in a downcast frame of mind. I was somewhat confused because it seemed illogical that my wife should have undertaken to avenge the rival whom she had displaced.

Emma came to say goodnight. She was smiling, pink-cheeked and fresh as a rose. Her brief access of tears had turned into joy, the natural reaction of a young and healthy girl. I had lately acquired some little understanding and my daughter was as transparent as water. My fit of temper had built up her importance at the party and this afforded her a naive enjoyment. I kissed her and I am sure that I reflected how lucky it was for me that she should be so lighthearted. Of course, for the sake of discipline, I should have warned her that her behavior toward me had not been very respectful. But I could not find words to express myself and I remained silent. After she had gone I was left with a feeling of confusion and worry over my vain effort to phrase my reproach. In order to calm myself I thought: "I'll speak to her tomorrow. I'll tell her my reasons." But this was of no avail. I had offended her and she had offended me. And her offense was doubled by the fact that she had forgotten the incident while it was still on my mind.

Ottavio came to say goodnight, too. Queer boy. He spoke to his mother and me almost as if he did not see us. He had already left the room when I called after him:

"Well, are you glad to be going to the pictures?"



He stopped and tried to remember. Then before he hurried on he shot back a dry:

"Yes."

He was very sleepy.

My wife held out to me a box of pills.

"Are these the right ones?" I asked with an icy stare.

"Yes, of course," she answered mildly.

She looked at me inquiringly, and not knowing how else to find out she said with some hesitation:

"Do you feel well?"

"Very well indeed," I retorted decisively, pulling off one shoe.

At this very moment I had a burning feeling in my stomach. "Just what she wanted," I thought to myself, with a logic whose falsity I only now perceive.

\* \* \*

I swallowed the pill with a drink of water and it somewhat cooled me off. I kissed my wife mechanically on the cheek. It was the kind of a kiss that goes with a pill. I couldn't very well get out of it without letting myself in for explanations and discussion. But I couldn't go to rest without stating my attitude in the struggle which to my mind had not yet ended, and just as I was getting into bed I said:

"I think the pill would have been more effective with a glass of wine."

My wife put out the light and the regularity of her breathing told me that her conscience did not trouble her, that is, as it suddenly occurred to me, she was indifferent to my troubles altogether. I had anxiously waited for this moment, and I told myself that at last I was free to breathe as heavily and noisily as I liked, in the way that seemed to me natural while I felt as I did, or even to give vent to my discouragement in loud sobbing. But as soon as I was free to give in to my distress it became all the greater. This was no freedom at all. How could I release the anger that still boiled up within me? There was nothing for me to do but to go over and over in my mind what I was going to say to my wife and daughter the following day: "You're very solicitous about my health when there's a chance to plague me about it in public, aren't you?" This was quite true. Here I was fuming alone in my bed while they were quietly asleep. I felt as if I were burning up; the heat ran through my body and into my throat. There was supposed to be a pitcher of water on the bedside table and I stretched my hand out to reach it. I hit an empty glass and the ringing sound was enough to wake up my wife. She's the kind that sleeps with one eye open, anyhow.

"Do you feel ill?" she asked in a low voice.

She was not quite sure of having heard something and feared she

might only disturb me for nothing. I was partly aware of what was in her mind, but I chose rather to attribute to her a perverse enjoyment of my sufferings, inasmuch as they proved that she had been in the right all along. I gave up the notion of a drink of water and flattened myself gradually out again in the bed. Immediately she fell back into the light sleep that allowed her to keep watch over me.

If I didn't want to suffer defeat at my wife's hands there was nothing for me to do but go to sleep. I shut my eyes and curled up on one side. I had to shift my position at once. I persevered and did not open my eyes, but whatever position I took made some part of my body uncomfortable. "There's no sleeping with a body like mine," I said to myself. It was as if my body were in motion and I were very much on the alert. A man who is running can't conceive of sleep, and I was panting like a runner; in my ears I heard the beat of heavy shoes on the ground. Perhaps I was sliding around the bed too gently to let all my limbs fall into just the right position simultaneously. I must make less of an effort; I must relax until every single part of my anatomy found its proper niche. I gave an involuntary jerk, and right away I heard my wife murmur:

"Do you feel ill?"

If she had used any other words but these I should have called upon her for help. But these words I could not answer, because there was in them an insulting reference to our discussion.

It must be easy to lie perfectly still. What can be hard about lying quietly in bed? I thought of all the hardships we run into in this world of ours and realized that by comparison lying still was nothing at all. Even corpses know enough to lie still. My perseverance led me to invent a most complicated but securely anchored position. I took hold of the upper part of the pillow with my teeth and twisted myself around so that my chest, too, lay on the pillow, my right leg hung out of the bed, almost touching the floor, and my left leg lay straight on the bed and pinned me down. Yes; I had discovered a brand new system. I was no longer clinging to the bed; the bed was clinging to me. I was so convinced of my own motionlessness that even when I began to ache all over I did not give in. When at last I did have to move I consoled myself with the reflection that a good part of this dreadful night had now gone by, and that in escaping the embrace of the bed I was entitled to feel the relief of a wrestler who has wriggled out of his opponent's grasp.

\* \* \*

For some time after this I did lie still. I was very tired. To my surprise I became aware of a light dazzling in closed eyes, from leaping flames that I supposed must come from the fire inside me. They were not real flames, but colors that seemed like them. Gradually they grew less



bright and settled into little circles, drops of a sticky, pale blue fluid ringed with streaks of red. They fell in a chain from up high, then each one stretched out, separated itself from the rest and disappeared from view below. All of a sudden it came to me that these drops were looking at me. In order to see me better they began to transform themselves into eyes. As each one stretched out into an elongated form just before falling a smaller circle appeared in the middle of it, the pale blue covering faded away, and there was a real eye, malicious and malevolent. I was followed by a host of enemies. I set up in bed groaning and cried out:

"Oh, my God!"

"Do you feel ill?" my wife asked promptly.

Some time must have gone by before I replied. I seemed to be no longer lying in bed but holding onto it because it stood in a vertical position and I was sliding to the floor. I shouted:

"I *am* ill, miserably ill!"

My wife had lit a candle and stood beside me in her pink nightdress. The light was reassuring; I had a clear sensation that I had been asleep and had just got awake. The bed had returned to its normal position and I was lying in it effortlessly. I looked at my wife with surprise, because ever since I realized that I had slept I was no longer sure of having called for her help.

"What do you want?" I asked.

Her expression was tired and sleepy. My cry had made her jump out of bed, but had not entirely roused her from the sleep which she was irresistibly drawn to pursue, even in preference to the satisfaction of hearing me surrender. To cut matters short she said:

"Would you like some of the drops the doctor prescribed for sleeping?"

In spite of my longing for sleep I hesitated.

"If you say so," I answered, trying to appear reluctant. Of course, taking the drops didn't mean confessing that I had been in the wrong and felt badly.

For a moment I enjoyed a great peace. It lasted just as long as my wife stood beside me in her pink nightdress counting out the drops by candlelight. The bed was once more horizontal and when I closed my eyes the lids shut out all light from my eyes. When I opened them from time to time the light of the candle and the pink nightdress afforded me the same security as complete darkness. But my wife did not choose to prolong her protection, and I was plunged once more into the night to struggle for peace.

I remembered that as a young man, when I was anxious to get to sleep I used to make myself think of an ugly old crone, who drove away the visions of beauty that obsessed me. Now there was no danger

in my calling upon a vision of beauty to come to my aid. This was the only consolation of old age. I ran over name by name the beautiful women I had desired in my youth, at a time when beautiful women existed in incredible profusion. But they did not rise up before me. Even now they would not be mine. I kept on naming them until one did come out of the night, Anna, just as she was years before, but with her lovely pink-and-white face wreathed in sorrow and reproach. It was plain that she had come to bring me not peace but remorse. Since she was there before me I began to argue with her. I had deserted her, to be sure, but she had lost very little time in marrying someone else, which of course she was quite free to do. Then she had given birth to a girl, now fifteen years old, who had her fair complexion, golden hair and blue eyes, but whose beauty was spoiled by a conflicting resemblance to her father: her hair was tightly curled instead of wavy, she had a wide face, a large mouth and thick lips. This combination of her mother's coloring with her father's lineaments was like a shameless public embrace of her parents. What could Anna, then, want of me, after she had shown herself so often in love with her husband?

This was the first time all evening that I felt I had won a battle. Anna became more remissive, almost as if she were confessing herself in the wrong. Her company was no longer displeasing to me; I allowed her to stay. And I fell asleep admiring her beauty and enjoying her submission.

\* \* \*

An atrocious dream. I was in some complicated place the nature of which I immediately understood as if I were part of it. This was a vast, rough, dark cave, bare of the ornamentation with which nature is generally so lavish, so that it was plainly a work of man. I was sitting on a three-legged wooden stool beside a glass box, which was lit up dimly by a light which I thought inherent to it. This was the only light in the place and it fell over my own person and a wall whose upper part was made up of unfinished stones and the lower part of cement. How expressive are the constructions we see in our dreams! Some may say that this is because it is only natural that the builder should understand them with ease. The surprising thing is that neither in his dream nor when he awakens is the builder aware of having built them. When he looks back at the dream world from which he has emerged, where constructions of every kind rose up in a jiffy, he is amazed that there everything was understood without a word of explanation.

So it was that I knew at once that the cave had been built by certain men who made use of it for a cure they had invented. This cure was bound to be fatal to one of the inmates (of whom there must have been a large number lurking in the shadows) but healing to the rest. The cure was a sort of religion demanding human sacrifice, and this did not in the least surprise me.



It was even easier to guess that, because I was placed near the glass box where the victim was doomed to die of asphyxiation, I was the one chosen to be sacrificed for the common good. Already I felt the pains of the cruel death that awaited me. I was short of breath, and because my head was aching and heavy I held it in both hands, leaning my elbows on my knees.

Suddenly all the things I already knew were repeated by shadows hidden around me. My wife spoke first: "Hurry up; the doctor says you're the one that has to get into the box." Her words caused me sorrow but I saw the logic of them. I did not protest, but I pretended not to hear her. And I thought to myself: "My wife's love for me was always on the stupid side." Other voices shouted imperatively: "Are you ready to obey?" Among them I could distinguish the voice of Dr. Paoli. I could make no objection, but I thought: "He's just doing it for the money."

I raised my head to look again at the glass box. Then I saw, sitting on its lid, the bride. Even perched up there she had her usual self-assured manner. Although I had little esteem for her I realized that she had an important role to play in my fate. I might have guessed as much even in real life if I had seen her sitting on the infernal machine that was supposed to kill me. And so I looked at her, figuratively wagging my tail. I felt exactly like a tiny dog that begs for its life in just this manner. To what low estate had I sunk! Then the bride spoke. Without the least trace of violence, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, she said:

"Uncle, the box is for you."

I had to fight for my life all alone. Of this I was certain. I had a feeling that I disposed of an immense reservoir of strength whose existence no one suspected. Just as before I had felt within myself the presence of an organ that enabled me to win my judge's favor without even opening my mouth, so now I felt another organ, whose nature I could not define, by whose virtue I could fight without a single revealing movement and thus catch my enemies off guard. My motionless effort took immediate effect. The stout Giovanni appeared all of a sudden inside the luminous glass box, sitting on a wooden stool like mine and in exactly the same position. He was leaning forward, because the box was too low for him, and he held his spectacles in his hand in order to prevent them from falling off his nose. He looked somewhat as if he were making a business deal and had taken off his spectacles so as to concentrate upon the matter at hand without the distraction of vision. Indeed, although he was already perspiring and short of breath, he seemed not the least concerned about his impending death but looked as malicious as ever, as I could see from his eyes, in whose expression there was evidence of the same effort which I myself had just put forth. Under these circumstances I felt no pity for him; rather, he inspired me with fear.

Giovanni, too, was successful. Soon there took his place in the trap the tall, thin and healthy Alberi. He sat in the same position as Giovanni but his plight was the worse for his outlandish height. He was literally bent over double and he would really have awakened my compassion if I had not seen that he, too, had a confident look about him in spite of his suffering. He gazed up at me with a wily smile, conscious of the fact that it was in his power to stave off death in the glass box.

Once more the bride spoke from on top of the lid:

"Now it must surely be your turn, Uncle."

She spoke slowly and pedantically, and her words were accompanied by another sound from far away and high above. From this prolonged sound emitted by someone who was moving rapidly away I learned that the cave ended in a steep corridor leading to the surface of the earth. The sound was a hiss of assent and it came from Anna, who once again was showing her hate for me. She did not dare put it into words because after all I had just convinced her that her conduct had been more to blame than mine. But conviction carries little weight where hate is involved.

I was condemned by all. In some far corner of the cave my wife and the doctor were pacing up and down in waiting and I knew intuitively that my wife looked resentful. She was gesticulating with her hands as she went over the list of my sins: my excesses of food and wine and my rudeness toward her and my daughter.

My attention was drawn to the glass box, from which Alberi was looking out at me triumphantly. I drew nearer, inch by inch, with my stool, knowing that when I was only a yard away, so the rule would have it, I should be drawn in and find myself suddenly gasping.

But there was still a hope of salvation. Giovanni, completely recovered from his weary struggle, appeared just beside the box, which he no longer had reason to fear since he had already been in it. (This, too, was one of the rules of the game.) He was standing up straight in the light, looking first at Alberi, who was still struggling and threatening from inside the box and then at me, as I drew slowly nearer and nearer. I cried out:

"Giovanni! Help me to keep him in there. . . . I'll give you money."

The cave echoed my shout in what seemed to be a derisive laugh. Now I understood. There was no appeal. Neither the first nor the second man to sit in the box was doomed to die, but the third. Here again one of the rules enforced in the cave was against me. It was doubly hard for me to recognize that the rule had not been invented then and there for my personal destruction but that it was native to the place. Giovanni did not even reply; he drew back in order to show how sorry he was that he couldn't save me, even for money.

Then I shouted again:



"If there's no other way, then take my daughter. She sleeps just in the next room. It will be quite easy."

This shout, too was answered by a resounding echo. I was distracted for a moment by the noise, but soon I called out for my daughter:

"Emma! Emma! Emma!"

From the depths of the cave came Emma's answer, in her still childish voice:

"Here I am, papa, here I am."

I thought she had not answered me promptly. Then I felt a violent upheaval, which I took for my forced leap into the box. I was still thinking: "Slow as a snail, that girl, when it comes to doing what she's told." Now her slowness spelled my ruin and I was filled with bitterness.

\* \* \*

I woke up. This was the upheaval; I had made a leap from one world into another. My head and chest were out of the bed and I should have fallen if my wife had not come to hold me up. She asked:

"Have you been dreaming?"

And then she said more gently:

"You were calling out for your daughter. See how you love her."

For a minute I was bewildered by reality; everything looked strange and out of place. And I said to my wife, who I thought must know what I was talking about:

"How can we get our children to forgive us for having brought them into this world?"

She answered me with perfect simplicity:

"Our children are supremely happy."

The life I had experienced in my dream still enveloped me and seemed to me overpoweringly real; I wanted to proclaim it out loud.

"Because they don't know . . ." I said.

Then I fell silent and was lost in my thoughts. Light began to come in through the window near my bed and I realized that I had no right to tell my dream, that I must hide the shame of it. Soon, as the soft, pale blue light imperiously filled the room, the feeling of shame left me. The events of the dream had no part in my life; it was not I who had wagged his tail like a puppy and consented to sacrifice his daughter's life for his own.

But I must see to it that I should never come again to the cave of horrors. For this reason I became docile and obedient to the doctor's orders. If it ever happens, independently of my will, not because I have drunk too heavily but because my last hour has come, that I must return to the cave, I shall leap into the glass box, if there is a glass box, of my own accord; I shall neither wag my tail nor shall I betray.

—Translated by FRANCES FRENAYE

Federigo Tozzi

## THE SUICIDE OF GIULIO

(from the novel, *Tre Croci*)

In the morning, Giulio said to himself:

"No, I will not deceive myself any longer. I understand now that I must look at things in a way that I did not know before. If I agree to live, and I do not at present feel any illness which might end my life, it would be the same as if I found pleasure in letting people torment me. But I must not let that happen, though I would suffer much less. It can't be that I lack the strength to do to myself that which I would not do to others. I may make a mistake; but it is necessary that I experiment with death! Last night it seemed as if I no longer had anything to do with my customary life in which I have believed until now. And I was not regretting anything. I had never dreamed so well."

The calm of the previous night was now manifesting itself like a swelling in a sickly body. But he continued to think with pleasure. "Some may think that I will kill myself by throwing myself out of the window; others, that I may drown myself. No, that isn't the way I'll kill myself."

And he left the house. The morning was damp and fresh. He stopped to watch a crippled woman who, leaning on a cane, and holding on to the railing with one hand, was attempting to climb the steps of San Martino. Never had he seen so willing a persistence, or such an eagerness full of joy. He felt that this frail little woman could signify something for which he searched in vain. And his despair grew. The next day the law would put its seals on the bookshop; and he had before him only a few hours in which to make a certain decision which might be final.

Turning down a street, he ran into Nisard who was coming towards him. His face was rapidly becoming contrite, as he said:

"What a misfortune that was! How sorry I am!"

Giulio, his face ravaged and almost unrecognizable for the emotions one could see on it, looked at him. Then he said:

"An inevitable thing! Do you want to accompany me a little? I was on my way to the bookshop; but if you are not ashamed to come with me, especially for what people might think, let's walk a little together."

Nisard immediately cut short his hesitancy, and turned back with him. They took their way as if each were anxious to please the other, along the Via delle Terme, where they were apt to meet fewer acquaintances.

The houses, tall and close together, give one a sense of monotonous confinement; with the alleys of Fontebranda like so many abysses which



allow to be seen in the distance, a green hill interlaced with black cypresses. They stopped in the Piazza di San Domenico, certain that none would hear them. There is a half-ruined garden with a fir-tree in the center, on which a band of street urchins were climbing. The church is an even red in color; its windows are bricked up, and its tower is cracked from top to bottom. And within an open space, between projecting walls near the tower, along a closed arch which reaches up to the roof, there is a strip of green, thicker at the base, which merges with the grass on the meadow.

It seemed to Giulio that he was breathing in all the air of the Piazza in one single mouthful; and he was like a boy who finds himself face to face with things he cannot understand, but to which he attaches himself all the same. He felt that here he could speak with as much sincerity as he wished; with immense sincerity. Nevertheless, he wished to prevent Nisard from pushing him to the point of speaking of himself; and he saw to it that the conversation never touched upon the subject of the forged notes.

Nisard marveled at that callous indifference which he attributed, wrongly, to a lack of conscience, or to a cynicism which he found rather dreadful, and which he did not dare discuss. Therefore, against his will, he complied with the bookseller; and, thinking that soon he could probably talk to him as freely as he had in former times, he led him to see Siena from the little wall of the Fortezza. He said to him: "Come and see how much more beautiful the colors are at this hour than they are in the morning. I became convinced of it, coming here mornings and afternoons."

At once there comes into view a great swelling of houses, and enclosed within, the Cathedral. While in Fontebranda the houses branch off leaving an empty space in the center, here they stand as if attached and crushed together under the Cathedral, leaning top-heavily over the gardens and the countryside. Then they gradually diminish in height until they disappear under a cliff, when only the roofs are visible. The larger houses support the others, and it is impossible to tell where the streets are, because the houses appear to be separated from each other by an almost bizarre confusion of cross cuts and intersections of all kinds and dimensions. And amidst all these clusters, and gaps, and openings of all shapes and sizes, the roofs are more thinly diffused, as the houses spill out over the slopes. The country was like a great expanse without end; and in that deep suave silence, Siena seemed withdrawn and inaccessible. And the more distant peaks, as far as the Cornate di Gerfalco, dispersed and filled the disappearing horizon.

Giulio looked hungrily. Never before had he loved his Siena as he did then, or been so proud of it. Nisard, who was observing the effect of it on his face, led him away at once, thinking that it had all been too much for him. And Giulio said:

"I could have stayed there forever!"

"You are a native of Siena, and I bet you have never been here."

"It's true. Only as a boy. But at that time there was much I didn't understand."

"Will you come back here by yourself now?"

"Who knows? We are alive to-day and maybe dead to-morrow.

And then, I! I remember when I was young. I had only to be alone a half an hour, without anything to do, when there would come over me a kind of doubt which made me afraid. I was not even sure that I was alive. I can't explain that doubt to you, but I will try to make you understand it. Sometimes in dreaming you must certainly have experienced a vague sensation, either pleasant or painful, which prevented you from believing in your dream, and you wished perhaps that it might have been reality instead. But that sensation separated you from your dream and kept it distant, and so, prevented you from identifying yourself with it. Well then, the reality—they call it reality—which was all about me, had the same effect upon me. I did not know whether what I saw was a continuous and greater dream to which I had become accustomed and of which I was conscious only occasionally. So that you might understand it better, imagine that the present itself was for me the sense of a conventional reality."

But Nisard was not in the mood for that sort of talk; and wrinkling his nose, he drew away from the bookseller without saying anything. The latter continued:

"In these few minutes that I have been with you in the Fortezza, I have realized what my life has been all these years. And I should not like to begin all over again. It seems as if we often lose our memory, and then it comes back more vivid than ever."

Nisard was making wry faces as he said tittering:

"I understand! I understand!"

But what he really wanted to say was: "I came with you because of the curiosity I have to know the story of the notes; and instead, you, give me these ramblings which are entirely out of place, and seem to be the nonsense of an impaired mind." And, in order to get away from an uncomfortable situation, he said that he must leave him, and return to San Domenico to see a panel-painting by Matteo di Giovanni which he was studying. He entered the church laughing, and thought that he would tell the story around, so that others might have something to laugh about too. And calling himself too credulous and too weak for having thought that it was up to him to comfort a madman of that type, he entered the chapel where the panel was hanging; and he forgot Giulio immediately.

But Giulio remained as if drunk; a prey to a kind of bitter joy. Inside of him he could feel moving around something like a body of parasites and evil things, all trying to overwhelm him. His states of con-

sciousness seemed to have crystallized, one close to the other, irreducibly; and he was trying in vain to fit them into one pattern, and to explain them by one single means. He no longer felt free; and he realized that his consciousness had conformed, not to his constantly changing emotions, but to certain immutable laws to which these emotions had perhaps adhered.

Now even his desire to die was unchanged. He did not consider it necessary to see the members of his family again, because he thought that it was his duty to be alone as long as possible. At that moment he felt no more affection for them. And when he found himself at the bookshop, he opened the door as if he were about to learn the reality of this feeling.

It was dark in the bookshop, with its closed shutters, and he lighted the gas. He looked around and there came to him a desire to hurl himself at those walls. They had caused him to lie and then to lose himself; they, the stronger.

Suddenly he heard someone knocking. Niccolò was calling him. Should he answer? Not just then. He waited until Niccolò had stopped knocking; and then he took from the drawer of the desk a strong rope with which a package of books had been tied. At that time he no longer believed that he would kill himself! And so he climbed on a stool, and thrusting the handle of a hammer inside a hook attached to one of the beams, he tried to see if it would hold. He was so certain that he would not kill himself! There he tied the rope in a slip-knot. Then he came down from the stool and began to look at the rope from all sides. He smiled and looked at it playfully, but thought that he would take it down, for fear that he might yield to it and put his neck inside.

Then he was talking to it frantically, so that it would not tempt him. But he did not dare touch it anymore. He said: "I shall leave it here always, so that they shall see the state to which I was reduced." He was now like a madman; and he propped up the door fearing that a crowd of people would come and break it down. They wouldn't be long now. He thought that he could hear them come from all sides. He could no longer hold out; the supports were giving way!

On the old chest, all those fake antiques were saying to him: "You are just like us! It is useless for you to try to escape us!" And he answered in a loud voice: "Wait, I am writing another signature." And then he saw the forged signature jumping around on the floor. He bent over to grab it, and caught his head under the shelves. The signature was there but he didn't see it anymore. "Look, I haven't got it in my hand!"

Then he put out the light. And in the darkness, without realizing that he was killing himself, he put his head into the noose. As he felt it tighten, he wanted to cry out, but he couldn't.

—Translated by SOPHIE MERRILL OTIS



Dino Campana  
FROM "ORPHIC SONGS"

CHIMERA

Ignorant whether your pale face  
Glanced at me fragmented through mountain clefts  
Or was the smile of distances unknown,  
The bent ivory  
Forehead gleaming,  
O younger sister  
Of the Gioconda:  
Or whether you were the smile of  
Extinguished springtimes  
In your paleness  
Mythical,  
O Princess, Princess of our adolescence:  
But for your poem unknown  
Formed out of loving and of pain,  
O musical bloodless girl  
Marked by a trace of blood  
Within the crookedness of lips,  
Princess of song:  
But for your virginal head  
Reclined, I, poet of the night,  
Stood vigil over the bright stars,  
Over the ocean of the night,  
I, for your tender mystery,  
I, for your slow unfolding.  
Ignorant whether the pale flame  
Of her hair was the living  
Brand of her paleness  
Or was a kind of vapor  
Settled upon my pain  
Or was the smile of a face by night alone:  
I regard the white rocks, sealed and silent sources of the winds,  
And the imperturbability of the firmament  
And the swollen streams which flow lamenting  
And the shadow of human labor stooped over the cold hills  
And once more through clear skies toward far-off, free-flowing  
          shadows  
A name goes out to you, a name, Chimera.

## VOYAGE TO MONTEVIDEO

The Spanish hills disappearing  
Among the green  
Within the gold twilight the brown earth harboring  
Singing?  
The lonely girl of unfamiliar lands  
Singing,  
On the hills' verge a violet hesitating. . .  
The azure evening closed upon the sea  
And yet the golden silence of the wing  
From time to time beat trembling beyond the mountains . . .  
Remote, with different colors tinted,  
Out of the most secret silences  
The golden birds sail off in the blue evening: the boat  
Now blindly crossing beating the darkness  
Our lost hearts bearing,  
Shadow threshing with azure wing on the sea.  
Till one day there came among us the grave Spanish matrons,  
They of the turbid and angelic eyes  
And the breasts big with giddiness. And once  
In a deep bay of a tropic islet,  
In a bay deeper and quieter yet than the night sky,  
Flung up in the enchanted light  
A white city fast asleep  
Under a spent volcano's splintery points  
In the equator's bad breath. At length,  
After the shouts and shadows of strange country  
And much creaking of chains and high running fever  
We left that tropic town  
For the uneasy night-time sea.  
Day after day we went, day after day: ships  
Heavy with sails dank with warm breaths inched by  
So close to us that from the deck we could see  
Bronzed, some girl of the new race,  
Eyes bright and garments finding wind. Till behold! Wild,  
At the end of one day the water  
Straggled and broke upon this other world . . .  
And how like long pent-up  
Mares by the dunes unbridled  
In toward the termless prairies  
Empty of any dwelling  
Racing we distanced the dunes till we stopped short  
Over sea water yellowed by the crass richness of a river.

Cool, fresh, electric was the light  
Of evening and the houses all looked empty  
Down by the pirate sea  
Of the city left to its devices  
Between the yellow sea and the dunes.

—Translated by WARREN RAMSEY

**Umberto Saba**

**TO MY WIFE**

You are like a chicken,  
a young white chicken.  
Wind ruffs its feathers as it bends to drink,  
as it scratches in the dust.  
But when, breast lifted, it struts about proudly  
across the grass,  
it moves with your slow and queenlike step.  
It is braver than the rooster.  
And so are all the females  
of all animals  
that in their serenity  
are close to God.  
And, if my eyes, my judgment do not mislead me  
you have your equal among such as they are;  
and in no other woman.

When evening makes the little hens drowsy  
the cheeping peep of their voices reminds me  
of your sweet voice  
when now and then you complain of your troubles  
unaware  
that in your voice there is the hen-coop's  
sad mild music.

You are like a pregnant heifer  
happy still, still unburdened,  
even gay.  
If you stroke her she will turn her head,  
her neck with a rosiness tenderly tinged;  
and, if you meet her and listen to her lowing,  
so piteous is the sound



you'll pull up a bunch of grass to give her;  
and that's how I offer my gifts to you  
when you are sad.

You are like a long little bitch  
which has such sweetness in her eyes  
yet in her heart is so fierce, so brave.  
Lying at your feet she seems a saint  
all afire with invincible fervor,  
her gaze turned up to look at you  
as to her Lord and God.  
But, when about the house and in the street  
she follows at your heels,  
if any one even so much as tries  
to come near you  
she shows gleaming teeth,  
hurt in her jealous love.

You are like a timid rabbit.  
In its narrow cage  
when it catches sight of you  
it gets up on its hind legs, pushing  
out at you  
motionless tall ears,  
begging you to bring it radishes and refuse.  
And, if you don't, it curls up on itself  
trying to hide in a corner's darkness.  
Who would again take away from it that food?  
Who would ever take the fur  
it plucks from its back  
to line the nest  
where some day it will bring forth its young?

You are like a swallow that returns with the Spring  
and is gone in Autumn.  
Only as yet you have not that art.  
But this you have of the swallow's ways:  
swift light motions;  
and this besides,  
that to me who felt so old and who was old  
you foretold another Spring.

You are like the frugal ant  
grandma talks about to the baby

when, hand in hand, they go to the country.  
So too in the bee I often refind you,  
and in all the females  
of all animals  
that in their serenity  
are close to God;  
and in no other woman.

—Translated by FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP

Aldo Palazzeschi

## TWO POEMS

### RIMINI

White sails red sails blue sails  
file by to the port of love,  
swollen with an intoxication.  
And a black one,  
heavy, slow in the background  
and stained with red trickles,  
moves imperceptibly.

In her gold and cherries and pearls  
Isotta laughs:  
"Yes, yes, yes.  
Press me close, Sigismund.  
I want to feel I am held close,  
tighter than your arms have ever held me:  
for all there is in heaven,  
for all time,  
for all the world:  
yes, yes, yes."

From a purple alcove Francesca  
looks out over the sea:  
"Paolo, for all the blood,  
for all the blood,  
yes."

## BELLAGIO

Between the lake's two branches  
(one branch itself the Lake of Como),  
on a silver platter  
a bouquet of flowers:

Bellagio.

With lifted ears the flowers quiver  
in the morning light,  
and among them there is a disorder  
of doors and windows,  
roofs and a church tower,  
balustrades of terraces,  
parapets and iron gratings.

In the light of the setting sun  
Bellagio  
drowns as if under glass.  
The flowers, their gaiety crushed  
by a sun-filled day,  
curl themselves in sleep;  
their colors fade.  
In the distance  
the song of silk looms is slowly spent  
partaking of the torpor of a dream.

A crinoline skims the garden's gravel path,  
here and there flicking it  
lightly without the faintest rustle,  
and vanishes under a trellised vault.  
Framed in hair black as ebony  
black eyes shine  
turned up to the skies.  
"And when the day breaks I shall leave you."

—Translated by FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP



Emilio Cecchi

## BLACK PANTHER

Some animals are absolutely the wrong color. On others Nature tried out the most varied colors, without reaching a satisfactory result. And she allowed the various efforts to run about the world, almost as though she were saying: "I have run out of patience; see whether you can do any better." Just as there are great paintings and cheap reproductions, so it is among animals; with practice one learns to distinguish works of genuine inspiration from variations and falsifications. Other animals show signs of having been touched up, of having been scraped. Perhaps they were classroom works to which the master set his skillful hand.

For example, at first one does not notice that even the black panther has been touched up; or, rather, repainted. It seems to have sprung forth from the mold of Creation without the slightest imperfection. The combination of its colors is so simple: against the black which clings like elastic tights are the large whitish eyes. Only when the animal yawns does the harmony vary for an instant in the red of its tongue and in the gilded ivory of its teeth. Then the black closes up again like a box, like a trap. There is no suggestion of doubt or repentance in such austere harmony.

And yet there was doubt, and there was retouching. At certain times, and in a diffused light, one can see a flourishing of small rings, like those which streak the coats of leopards, of common panthers, and of other large cats. Thus, poor people, because they cannot buy new clothes for their mourning, bring an old suit to the dyer's. With time the black fades and turns green; and beneath the black the flowers and the checks of the old material become visible.

I confess that when I noticed this I was disappointed; as though, while looking over a new object of which I was proud, I had suddenly discovered a flaw. I, a great admirer of such animals, had to admit that, in a way, they were dyed. It was the very feeling experienced by a man who adores a beautiful woman and finds out that her hair is dyed. Perhaps there is nothing very bad about it. But she could have warned him. At any rate, after a moment, I again liked panthers as much as before. Their velvet seemed to me, as before, gloomy and immaculate. I realized that I was wrong in getting angry. And I even derived a warning from this.

How Nature had persisted, this time, in returning to her own work and doing it over, for the sake of achieving a masterpiece! Having decorated with graceful arabesques a coat of gold like those of the ancient *condottieri*, she had understood that the excessive luxury, the excessive elegance spoiled the final effect. And she had wildly applied black; like

an artist who rids himself of all coquettishness, and tries to impress by only one great poetic idea, expressed with the most meager means. What a lesson for those writers and artists who are immediately satisfied with whatever pours forth from their pens or brushes! And what a lesson for those others who trust in artificialities, embellishments, frivolities! Here a bit of lampblack, there a few dabs of phosphorus, and it is finished.

This animal is so simplified that in reality it no longer seems a work of Nature, but of art. Its dark mass swallows and cancels in itself all the details of form. On the rare occasions when one chances to see it in a squatting position one is apt to mistake it for a hole in the wall or in the floor of the cage; and in the far end of that hole those demon eyes flash. But it never stays still. It seems to be looking about itself for its shadow, quietly, so as not to frighten it, without realizing that the shadow is on its own back, without realizing that it is peering out of the holes of its own shadow; as out of the holes of a mask.

Balanced by its tail, which, as it moves backward and forward, tests the air like the balancing-pole of a tight rope walker, its sinuous body stretches and shrinks untiringly, arches, springs up. Because in most animals the relation between air and earth is a peaceful, definite one. The body remains quietly immersed in the atmosphere, breathes it in. It rests quietly on the earth. But this beast is similar to sea-eels, which, seemingly frightened by the element which imprisons them, find no peace. It flexes its back, gliding under the air as though it were a lashing fire. It pulls back its paw from a floor that burns and reels. It has been cut off from its original darkness. A trick has exposed it to the light. And, like a snake, it probes the crack in a stone, the shadow's crevice, in order to slide into it and disappear.

There is something supernatural and enigmatic in its funereal simplicity. Its triangular face recalls the Egyptian goddesses with the feline heads, Poe's metaphysical monsters. Standing on its hind legs, it threatens to claw its companion, which also rears up and shows its claws; identical in every respect, and almost the same figure in reverse. Then the heraldic group breaks up. Once again the animals go along their sinuous, swaying way, as they look at each other and snarl. Their movements, neither rapid nor slow, are woven into a regular, implacable, morbid rhythm. And within the geometrical bars the two beasts seem to merge and become one, as in a single mass of many limbs, vibrant and colossal; they become two and then again one; and with the monotony of their movement they produce a kind of narcotic illusion which hurts the eyes. One thinks of a magician's trick. Black magic, of course.

—Translated by SALVATORE CASTIGLIONE

Giuseppe Ungaretti

JULY

When it throws itself upon us,  
The beautiful foliage is made  
In the sad color of the rose.

It grinds ravines, drinks rivers,  
Pulverizes rocks, dazzles.  
It is a fury that persists; it is the inplacable,  
It pours out space, makes dung-hills blinding,  
It is summer and through the centuries  
With its searing eyes  
It goes, despoiling the skeleton of the earth.

—Translated by WILLIAM FENSE WEAVER

Leo Ferrero

## THE DEATH OF ORLANDO

(from the play, *Angelica*)

ALL: Down with Orlando!

ORLANDO: I shall make free men of you in spite of yourselves. (*A revolver shot. Orlando falls. Everyone is silenced by fear.*)

Oh, God! How bitter life is.

THE MASKS TOGETHER: Who did it? Who shot him? Who did it? Get a doctor! Is he dead? Is he wounded? (*They surround Orlando.*)

PANTALON: He must be taken to the hospital.

ORLANDO: No, leave me here. I have but a few minutes to live. (*Confusion in the café.*)

VOICES: He's dead! They killed him! Who killed him?

TARTAGLIA: (*To Valeria.*) Go get a doctor. (*The masks run to left and to right.*)

ORLANDO: Angelica! (*She approaches.*) Why did you kill me? I loved you so much.

ANGELICA: You loved me? You?

ORLANDO: It does no good to tell you! It does no good to want you! I saw it from the beginning. I saw that you will never belong to anyone. You won't! (*A doctor comes in. He auscults Orlando.*)

THE DOCTOR: He can't live. Who killed him?

PANTALON: Who killed him? (*Angelica disappears.*)



GIANDUIA: This is abominable. It's a disgrace.

MENEGHINO: They killed Orlando. It's an unpardonable crime.

PULCINELLA: He should never have been killed.

PANTALON: After all is said and done, it was he who led the Revolution.

VALERIO: What ever will we do without Orlando?

THE DOCTOR: As long as we had Orlando with us, the Regent was not to be feared. . . .

TARTAGLIA: But now. . . .

*(Dawn bathes the church steeples and the sky in rosy tints. The city is still purple in the darkness.)*

ORLANDO: *(Opening his eyes.)* The day is breaking. My last day is breaking. I shall die. Die! Strange word! Die! Isn't it the thing that is always happening to other people? *(A silence.)*

And when you open your windows you will again see the resplendent morning sun gilding the dust. You will see the trees, the sky, the birds, women who smile and love, men who suffer, the harvest when it is ripe, heavy rains or the dry earth, and thousands of little things. You will see another and another autumn, deceptively transparent, in which sounds are pure and far-reaching, in which the bees make music sweet to the ear, in which the sky is green and every living thing is weary. You will see vast, superhuman and indifferently springtimes. And you will follow the change of the seasons in your everlasting search for a better world.

*(A silence. He is delirious for a moment.)*

I hate you! Go away! You think you know all about life because you look after your businesses. Business is the ignoble scab on the earth's surface. Men, why have you no longer faith in anything? Because you are nothing, and you measure everyone in the world by your own standards. You will never be happy so long as you cling to your poor idea of happiness. What am I saying? *(A silence.)*

I don't want to die hating you. You don't yet know whence I came, so why should you love me? Well, I'll tell you. I, too, was born in this city, this city of masks. But I left it because I couldn't bear to look upon the injustices practised here. I said to myself: "Why has this city always, in all ages and under all its rulers, crowned stupidity and crucified its men of genius? Its great men must be the greatest in the world, if they have been able to work and struggle for their country against their countrymen's will. We are only given one attitude toward life. We must choose between a living one or a dying one. Only those cities flourish in which men have learned not to kill life. Who has put this sombre intoxication which is death into our hearts?" So I left my country. But from afar, I had a nostalgia for its glorious sun, for its fair vineyards, for

its twilights consumed by an ancient languor, for its deep sea trembling in the heart of its plains, for its sweet, devoted women, for its men with their intuitive eyes, for its statues, for its silences, for its despairing magnificence. These are the charms which attracted all its martyrs. One cannot forget it and one asks only to die for it, just as one does for a marvelous, indifferent mistress. I came back, my friends, because I thought this city too beautiful to be left to fall to ruin. . . . (*A silence.*)

And I came back without hope. . . .

INNKEEPER: (*Coming out of the café only half clothed.*) Is it true that Orlando is dead? It is true. Orlando is dead. Who killed him? Who was the assassin, the villain, the traitor, the Judas who killed him? My Lord, how pale he looks. But bring him a cushion. (*She runs to the café and brings him a cushion.*)

Tell me, Doctor, is there no hope? But who killed him? God, how he is suffering! It was he who saved us. Without him we'd all be slaves. What could you have done, *all* of you? Yes, *you*, Ministers of State or *you*, great captains of industry? Nothing! Nothing! And you let him be killed! You didn't defend and protect him! Orlando is a hero.

ALL: A hero! He's a hero! Long live Orlando! Long live Orlando!

HARLEQUIN: We ought to put up a monument to him.

ORLANDO: (*Opening his eyes.*) Why, my friends, do you wait for those who love you to die before showing your love for them?

THE DOCTOR: He is dead.

(*The men remove their hats. The women kneel to pray. The stage is darkened for a moment while a funeral march is played. When the lights are turned up, we see the sunny square crowded with people. Four men in black carry a stretcher bearing the body of Orlando. All the characters of the play follow gravely in double file.*)

PANTALOO: He was a shrewd fellow, in spite of appearances, but he bit off too much and he paid for it with his life.

BRIGHELLA: He certainly wasn't a statesman. He was a poet who wielded the sceptre as if it were a pen.

(*They file by. Enter the Doctor and Valerio.*)

THE DOCTOR: His vanity went so far that he made it a point of honor to seem simple, and he disdained, with all his might, the homage which really intoxicated him.

VALERIO: He was a weakling who wanted to be heroic. Inferiority-superiority complex.

(*They file by. Enter Tartaglia and Pulcinella.*)

TARTAGLIA: He knew how to rouse people, but he couldn't command respect. He didn't have it in him. He was only a demagogue.

PULCINELLA: He was above all ambitious, but he would never have succeeded because his queer prejudices would always have kept him from being himself. He was an upstart who never got there.

*(They file by. Enter Scaramouche and Francatrippa.)*

SCARAMOUCHE: He believed in the power of ideas, of feelings, in the importance of laws and in the sanctity of treaties. That is to say, he believed in nothing sound. He could never have created an Empire: He aimed too low.

FRANCATRIPPA: He was a man of action sometimes, but couldn't think things out. Logical in his ideas, yet! That is to say, he paid no attention to realities. He thought himself a poet, and he was only a politician.

*(They file by. Enter the Lieut. and Isabella.)*

LIEUT.: Did you see him on horseback, Madame?

ISABELLA: Please, don't remind me of it. He was ridiculous.

*(They file past. Enter Harlequin and Angelica running.)*

HARLEQUIN: You're late again, Angelica. What a beautiful frock!

ANGELICA: Did you finally get the commission?

HARLEQUIN: Yes, I'm to make the monument.

*(They file by. Enter Meneghino and Giandua.)*

GIANDUA: I can't make it out. Why sacrifice himself? For whom? For what?

MENEGHINO: For himself, for us, for the whole world!

GIANDUA: Men like Orlando will always be crucified by their own people, under all regimes, in all countries, in all ages.

MENEGHINO: But only they are immortal. It is they who will change the face of a world suffering daily from being denied its heart's desire.

*(Giandua shrugs his shoulders. The Innkeeper sobs loudly as she walks slowly after the others.)*

CURTAIN

—Translated by MICHELE VACCARIELLO

Elio Vittorini

## CONVERSATION WITH THE MOTHER

*(from the novel, Conversazione in Sicilia)*

My mother took a broom and swept the kitchen floor. She was so abundantly a woman and a mother rolled into one that I thought to myself with suppressed laughter that she could easily have taken the place of one of those she had just referred to as outrageous bitches. She,



too, for all her rough hands, was a queen, and a stranger might well see some mysterious power in her and call her his queen bee, the mother of every enthusiasm.

"Why not?" I said under my breath.

She was too abundantly a mother to sink to the level of an outworn wife, a pitiful creature looking on at her husband's propensities for other women. There was too much honey stored away in her, as she moved about the kitchen, tall and with still almost blond hair, a red shawl thrown across her shoulders. Yes, there was too much honey in her; *she* could never be pitiful.

Still holding back my laughter, I said: "You're a funny one! So you wanted them to feel they were bitches. . . ."

"Yes, I did," said my mother. "I wanted to be in a position to laugh the whole thing off. . . ."

"You're a funny one," I said. "So you would have laughed the thing off?"

"Of course. It wouldn't have mattered to me in the least. I'd have had a good laugh. But he didn't treat them like bitches. . . ."

"Well, why should he? They had husbands and children too, didn't they?"

"Just so. They didn't *have* to be bitches."

"Did they do anything so very filthy? Didn't they do the same thing with him that you did? Or was it something different?"

"Something different?" exclaimed my mother.

And for a moment she stopped sweeping.

"What do you mean, something different? They did the same thing, of course. What else could they do?"

"Well, then?" I said. "They had husbands, and children, too, just like you. And they didn't do anything filthier with him than what you did yourself. Why should he have tried to make them feel like bitches?"

"But he wasn't their husband, he was my husband. . . ."

"Is that the difference?" I asked, still laughing inside. I saw her standing stock-still in the middle of the kitchen, with her broom half raised in one hand, and I laughed to myself.

"I don't follow your reasoning," I said. And, still laughing, I decided to risk everything.

"I don't follow your reasoning," I said again. "Were you filthy when you did the same thing with other men?"

My mother did not blush. Her eyes lit up and she pressed her lips together in a hard line. Her body stiffened and she drew herself up to her full height. She was jolted in her store of honey, but she did not blush.

Laughing inside, I said:

"Because I suppose you used to go down to the valley, too. . . ." I

enjoyed stirring her up in her honey; I laughed inside and my words came easily.

"Surely you didn't spend all your time in the kitchen!" I said. "You must have gone to meet someone in the valley, you know!"

"Oh!" said my mother. She stood like a stone in the middle of the kitchen floor, shaken up in her age-old honey, but she did not blush, and she was not ashamed. "Oh!" she said, looking down at me.

She was something more than just my mother as she said it, she was a bird-mother, a queen bee. But the honey in her was too old, it was soon quieted and flattened out again, with only a ripple of mischief left on the surface. After all, I was a son, twenty-nine, almost thirty, years of age and for half of that time, fifteen years now, I had been a stranger to her, half of me was a strange man. And so she began to sweep again and said: "Well, he had it coming to him, didn't he, if I went once or twice with another man?"

I laughed to myself and thought: "Dear old bitch!"

"Of course he had it coming to him," I said. Then I asked: "Did you go often? With a lot of men?"

"Oh!" my mother exclaimed. "You don't think I played the drudge for a lot of men, do you?"

"No indeed. I wondered if you went with one man, or two. . . ."

"One! Just one! The other one was a mistake, and he doesn't count."

"A mistake?" I said. "What do you mean, a mistake?"

"It was with a man we knew in Messina, just after the earthquake. . . . In all the confusion there was after the earthquake. I was very young, and that was all there was to it."

"What do you know about that!" I said. "And the other one?"

"Oh! The other one was just an accident."

"Was he an old acquaintance, too?"

"No. He was someone I didn't even know."

"Someone you didn't even know?"

"What's so strange about that? You don't know the circumstances."

"I suppose he used brute force, then."

"Brute force?"

I laughed to myself at the tone of voice in which she said these words. Then, looking at her as if from a remote point of the earth's surface, not from within her kitchen, in the heart of her own Sicily, I asked: "Where was it? Did you used to go down to the railway line-man's house in those days?"

\* \* \*

"We were at Acquaviva," said my mother.

I was listening to her from a remote point, and I could only see Acquaviva as far, far away, a lonely spot at the foot of a mountain.

I managed to say: "We were grown boys at Acquaviva. It was after the war."

"What of that?" said my mother. "Was I to ask leave of you grown boys? You were eleven. You went to school, the lot of you, and you played games. . . ."

This was life in those wells of loneliness, Acquaviva, San Cataldo, Serradifalco. The boys went off to school on a freight train, or played in the cracks and crevices of the rolling ground; the father turned up the soil with his shovel and the mother bent over her washing or some other work, each one of them with his own particular devil under the lonely sky.

It was all very beautiful seen far, far away, but my mother said the summer in question was a terrible one. Not a drop of water in the streams for fifty miles around, and nothing but fields of stubble as far as the eye could see, from where the sun rose to where it set. Houses were scattered ten or fifteen miles apart except for the railway linemen's huts at intervals along the tracks, crushed by the loneliness around them. Not a single shadow for all those miles around, the grasshoppers bursting open with the heat and the snails shriveled up in their shells, nothing but the glare of the sun. "It was a terrible summer," said my mother.

She had finished sweeping and was walking about the kitchen, putting things in place. She did not tell me the story; she simply answered my questions.

"Was it morning or afternoon?" I asked.

"Afternoon, as I remember. There were no wasps, no flies, nothing. . . . It must have been afternoon."

"What were you doing?" I asked.

"I had just finished baking bread. . . ."

That was it. Miles and miles with nothing but the smell of dead snakes in the sun, and then, all of a sudden, the smell of fresh bread hanging over a house. "I had just finished baking bread," said my mother.

"And what then?" I asked.

"I was doing the wash. We had a tub outside near the well, and it must have been afternoon because there was a spot of shade to one side of the tub. . . . I always did the wash in the afternoon."

It was afternoon, then, and the smell of fresh bread hung over the house; there was a well and water in it that was brought by tank-car, and a woman doing her wash. But my mother didn't tell me all this together; she simply answered my questions.

"And what about him?" I asked.

"He was on foot," said my mother.

"On foot!" I exclaimed.



"Yes, he was the kind that travels by foot."

"All those miles without a drop of water, without a single village on the way?"

"Yes. He had a knapsack with a few clothes in it and he was wearing a soldier's uniform without any insignia and a farmer's cap on his head. He had taken his shoes off, tied them together and swung them across his shoulders. . . ."

"Did he come from very far?"

"I suppose so. He said he had come by Pietraperzia, Mazzarino, Butera, Terranova and dozens of other places. He seemed to have come all the way from wherever it was the war had stopped. He still had on his soldier's uniform, without any insignia."

"All that way on foot?" I said. "By Terranova, Butera, Mazzarino, Pietraperzia?"

"On foot, yes. For forty-eight hours he hadn't come to a single village or seen a living soul."

"And he hadn't eaten for forty-eight hours? Or drunk for forty-eight hours?"

"Worse than that. The last human dwelling he had seen was a big farm and the dogs barked him off like a tramp. That was what he told me after he had drunk a whole pail of water."

She stopped as if she had nothing more to say, and I asked: "Didn't he want more than water?"

"Oh, he wanted more than that, if he could get it," said my mother. "He didn't ask for it, but I gave him a loaf of bread just an hour out of the oven. I dressed it with oil and salt and marjoram and he sniffed the air and smelled the bread and said 'God be praised!'"

My mother stopped again. She wasn't telling me the story; she was simply answering my questions. I asked her something else, I don't remember what, and she said that the man looked at her while he said "God be praised!" and ate the bread. And I asked her another question, I don't remember what, and she said how she understood that the man was hungry and thirsty for something more; he didn't ask for it when he said "God be praised!" but he did want more if he could get it. Again I asked her a question, I don't know what, and she said how she didn't want the man to go hungry and thirsty for anything, how she wanted him to be satisfied, how it seemed to her Christian charity to satisfy his hunger and thirst for something more. "Dear old bitch!" I thought to myself.

"In short, this was only a passing thing, too."

"No," said my mother. "He came back other afternoons."

"He must have lived nearby, then. He wasn't going so very far."

"Yes, he was. He was on his way to Palermo, and he had been through most of Sicily."

"He was going to Palermo, was he? Did he go to Palermo, then?"

"He was going there, but he didn't go. He went as far as Bivona; there he found work in a sulphur mine and there he stayed."

"Bivona?" I said. "Bivona's a good way from Acquaviva. . . ."

"Beyond the mountain," said my mother. "About twenty-five miles. There's no town nearer than twenty-five miles to Acquaviva."

"There you're mistaken," I said. "Casteltermini is nearer than twenty-five miles. Why didn't he stop at Casteltermini?"

"Perhaps there wasn't work at Casteltermini. Or perhaps he meant to go on to Palermo until he came to Bivona, and there he changed his mind."

"And he came twenty-five miles on foot to see you?" I said.

"Twenty-five miles there and twenty-five miles back. He was the kind that travels by foot. . . . The seventh day after that first afternoon he turned up again."

"Did he turn up again often?"

"Quite a few times," said my mother. "He brought me presents of a sort. Once he brought me a honey-comb, that made the whole house smell sweet. . . ."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "And how did it happen that finally he never came back?"

"Well, you see . . . " said my mother. But she interrupted herself to look at me and say: "Aren't you going to ask me if he was a 'Lombard' like the one you met on the train?"

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Why should I? Where's the connection?"

"I think he was," said my mother. "I think he heard the call to some other job to be done. Didn't you tell me a 'Lombard' was a man with his mind on some other job to be done?"

"And he heard the call to some other job to be done?" I said, "That fellow? The tramp?"

"Yes," said my mother. "Toward winter there was a strike in the sulphur mines and the peasants rebelled alongside the miners. Trainloads of gendarmes were sent to put them down. Over a hundred died at Bivona. Not gendarmes. Miners and peasants. . . ."

"And you think he was one of them?"

"I do," said my mother. "Otherwise, why didn't he come back?"

"Ah!" I said. I looked at my mother and saw that she had finished tidying the kitchen. She was quite still and with one hand she was flattening out her dress against her leg. "Dear old bitch!" I thought.

—Translated by FRANCES FRENAYE

Eugenio Montale

## TWO POEMS

### QUASI UNA FANTASIA

Dawn flows back, its intimation  
touches me from the dull  
silver shining on the walls:  
it lays its stripes of light on the closed windows.  
The advent of the sun  
recurs, but not  
the accustomed din, the scattered morning voices.

Thinking of a-day of enchantment  
from the ferris-wheel of equal turning hours  
I slip away.  
Time has ripened in me, unwitting wizard,  
Power which must spend itself.  
Dissimulated, I will steal away  
Through lofty corridors  
along abandoned avenues.

I will shape for my feet a land of stainless snow  
Bland as a snowscape in a tapestry  
with a late glowing in the fleecy sky.  
Ripe with invisible light, forests and hills  
will bespeak me the praise of all glad renewals.  
And gladly I will read  
like an alphabet of the absolute  
the tracings of the branches black on white.  
All the past in one moment  
will compose its pageant before my eyes.  
No sound whatever will trouble  
that solitary happiness.  
There will ride through the air  
or glide to rest on a pole  
some random cock of Spring.

### THE WALL

To lie in shadow on the lawn  
by a crumbling wall, pale and withdrawn,  
and spy in the weeds the gliding snake  
and hear the rustle blackbirds make—



To watch in the cracked earth and grass  
battalions of red ants at drill,  
that break and form ranks, pass and repass  
in busy marches on some small dunghill—

To catch, each time the leaves blow free  
the faint and pulsing motion of the sea,  
while ceaseless, tremulous and shrill  
the cicadas chatter on the bald hill—

Rising, to wander in bewilderment  
with the noon's dazzle and the sorry thought  
how all our life and all its labors spent  
are like a man upon a journey sent  
along a wall that's sheer and steep and endless, dressed  
with bits of broken bottles on its crest.

—Translated by MAURICE ENGLISH

**Gianna Manzini**

## **OLD STORY**

That his wife would continue to read after he, with the newspaper put down and the light turned off, had put the blanket up well to his mouth, made him uncomfortable, and he did not understand that Celeste needed only to see him sleep to take courage to love him. That frown, the straight line between the eyebrows which protested against the light and lent him a benevolently grudging air, made her tender; and how peaceful to hear him breathe at regular intervals, lightly; this was Life, the life of a man in constant breath, in a mysterious union of the blood with the air: without the mess of words, without the confusion or defense of gestures, all the traffic with which the hours of a man are fenced off. "Who finds his way in the life of a businessman? His time is made like an accordion, repressed in an instant or stretched like rubber."

She imagined her husband fleeing her behind the wings of an invisible screen, and she herself running after him. Now he was here, now suddenly on the other side, and now, who knows how, right behind her: and every time screened behind an interview, a long waiting room, a contract, the sudden falling due of a note from the bank. What rage! She touched his shoulder stopping the gesture which wanted to strip him of all his lies. Continuing to sleep, Guglielmo muffled in hurried breathing a confused "No, no," of excuse. He seemed like a boy. "For him sleep is a beneficial humiliation. Indeed, it vanquishes him. It even makes him

look smaller." She adjusted the blanket over his shoulder. "Maybe if we lived in the country. . . . He too at times thought that as soon as possible we would take ourselves away from the city's grasp. Sooner or later you wind up being enmeshed in its machinery, he said; then it divests us of intimacy and silence and renders us the more slaves the more it enriches us." But she was aware that she was lending to the speech of her husband the language and even the cadence of the page on which her open hand rested. "Strange—you think you are inattentive to discover only that through the eyes even more of the substance of a tale has entered your soul."

She continued to read of two fiancés who run to meet each other in a garden.

Already drowsy, she saw in the light of that garden a resplendent white liquid profuse with feathery plants, of minute leaves of spiderfine legs held up like an accent on top of a note; and all of them together were like a whisper which indicates a vague beginning of substance and becomes a sort of back rest on which the moon languishingly floats down.

"In the country . . . " she said to herself, coming to on a fine thread of consciousness . . . "isolated. . . ." In the half-awakeness she saw instead herself near a man who once had been in love with her. The little path between the fields was narrow. They went Indian file, a woman in red in front of them, Celeste after her and last the man, alive and present only through his eyes. She had in fact the wish to defend with her hand her neck on which his glance was burning. But the closer she was held by the compass of those eyes, the freer and more agile she felt. At the core of her being, guided by that look of love, she found a new space, between moments of sweetness and anguish, in quick succession nearly without interval: a new space, very free, maybe prohibited which made her dizzy. Gestures and words blossomed spontaneously, like with children, rich with extravagant sense. So that she, lightly and quasi dancingly, plucked a leaf from a tree and in passing, without turning around, held it out to the man who took it tremblingly as if he would break it alive from the hand that rested on her backbone.

In this half sleep the colors revealed themselves to her as if they were faces: the gushing green of the meadow by the side of the yellow path, the vermilion shawl of her friend which, its fringes moving, became a great bird fallen in fire from a heavenly blue strip of the livid sky, and finally the leaf which she had just gathered from the tree. Pale, it imprisoned bluish light. What miracle: it gently grew between her lightly gathered thumb and forefinger. It was a small lance and the breath of an angel had silvered it.

Already asleep she recited, her voice heavy with wonder:

"A leaf from an olive tree. . . ."

Guglielmo awakened and, worried, asked her:

"What did you say?"

"I had fallen asleep. I was already dreaming."

"And what has the olive leaf to do with it?"

"We were in church. Together. It was the benediction of the olive branches."

Heavily he fell back on the pillow and was immediately asleep again.

\* \* \*

"How easily he was appeased. When people are in love, however, what an inexhaustible desire to know and to confess to each other: each talk becomes for the soul the day of the blessing of the Holy Water. But now, just not to lose any time. Look: he sleeps as if he would pay a debt, conscientiously and full of scruples. And yet, once he was courageous in extorting my thoughts and in speaking of himself, and would have been incapable of such stubborn sleep.

"How different from the time when—it was high spring: the magnolias were all in bloom and festively vied with the jasmine to shatter the night with whiteness and perfume—he held me back at the iron fence and confided to me: 'I seem strong, yet not even a leaf can be lighter than I. What only grazes me carries me away. Therefore, hold me tight.'"

At some distance, the sounds of a noisy peasant fiesta. The organ of a merry-go-round, some shots at the booth and the voice of a man whom it was easy to imagine on the platform of an open shed.

Guglielmo insisted on explaining himself: "A damnation, you know, thinking you are elastic and alive only in moments of flight, when you break an order, throw off your fetters."

Between one shot and the next from that timid booth, the words shone white like against a blackboard. And this too was beautiful. "But to have found you is a feast which will last all life long." That was just what he had said. She wanted to confront those words with the face of the bad-tempered man who slept at her side. Guglielmo held his hand open on his face and resembled a boy playing hide and seek. It was no longer possible to reproach him. Raising herself, as if she wanted to cradle him, Celeste leaned an elbow on his cushion. In the curve of arm and shoulder the head of the man in profile towards his breast looked like an antique medal. "Without truce, I attack and defend him: I am at the same time his accuser and advocate: in short, a wife. If he only were sick, at least for a week, just so he had to deliver himself to me." But she was afraid. "What do I stoop to desire! I, a young and beautiful woman."

She bound in a tie the slip-knots of the rose ribbon which hung from her décolletée, set the waves of her hair with a light touch of her fingers, and smiled in satisfaction. Well, now, to open a fan.

She saw herself again, reclining on the bed, convalescing, while young Concetta, a teen-age niece, looked on enraptured. In her great,



staring eyes she had found, with greater certainty than in a mirror, her face of that moment, as per magic reflected by the paper of the fan open at her breast. Light colors, hers, which in the same way suggested a graceful temerity by way of the many black touches like china ink. From that time on, wherever she posed a little, she saw herself in all that gloss of a Japanese print. Such a picture, studiously invoked, she tried to resemble, adapting herself to it rather with an abstract air than with movements which conceded a right to her upturned nose and the slanting eyes with the frozen brown light inside them.

"I must cease to adjust myself like a teen-age girl when I feel that I am watched. After all, it's ridiculous." The reproach was serious. It did not endure: immediately she flirted, with a sinuous sigh, too indulgent and nearly lamenting her hands which always fluttered to spring forth when a young man of recent acquaintance looked at her. "But that one despoils with his eyes, outright disorderly. . . ." Then, with a sudden shift of tone (and at the bottom of the bed the light made top on the silk) "How shameless!" The protest was bristly and blossoming like a branch of hawthorne.

Safeguarded by a shadow of stiff reserve, she conceded: "My name—he pronounces it with timidity, all in small letters, just like the color of the sky: celeste." And interrupting the grimacing cadence: "Every time I hear him pronounce it I remember the azure blue of the veins in the fold of elbow and knee, with discomfiture: my God, like a tickle, that makes me laugh."

\* \* \*

That discomfiture and that nervous laugh brought up the memory of a beautiful moment of her first youth. She was a student. At the time of examinations. Oh, the window of a girl who studies, in deep night. She goes near it and finds herself like at the end of a telescope which hanging from the sky, with all its stars and all its silence, glides slowly from one end of the street to the other, while in her mind, in an order which seems to her mysterious and natural at the same time, flow centuries of history, centuries of literature. . . . Nothing everyday-like in so much space of the sky and of the mind: for the face of the companion who expects her the following morning is the face of the future.

The last examination. They had studied all afternoon in the corner of a coffehouse. Before they left each other in the middle of a bridge, they lingered in saying good-bye.

Suddenly a rain of May flies began to fall: it was a bizarre way of that inexhaustible summer day to delay the night. Childish wings, of suspected reality, of another life, with a slightly funereal odor, came down in gushes more and more numerous. Heavy and already rotten on their descent, they fell like a horrible cataract on the eyes of the evening. The two friends held each other by their hands. Now the lamps

were all darkened: a white mourning. Strewn with dead butterflies, the bridge seemed swollen and adorned with flowers for a procession. A horse passed and fell with such sweetness that it seemed to go down on its knees. Celeste thought she was just stunned. But as she freed her hand from his, unexpectedly a sigh escaped her. She recaptured it with short outbreaks of a fatuous, senseless laugh.

\* \* \*

"For more than an hour the automobiles could not run."

"A streetcar derailed."

"The horses grew diffident and did not want to go on."

"Never so many were seen at the windows."

"The May flies came into the houses, covered the beds, filled the glasses, powdered the hair of children white and fell like a lugubrious garland on the front of the old ones."

"Butterflies who live an instant presided over the city for hours."

There was a fairy-tale quality about the chronicle of that summer evening which in itself brought back the excitement of the hour. "Everything becomes magic when one is in love."

She would have liked to find again, even if only for an instant, the abandon of the movement with which she had offered the olive leaf to the man who followed her without speaking; and the sense of definite pardon, adoring and courageous which rose in her soul, at odds only with herself, when her husband nearly announced to her her own fatal infidelity; and the trepidation, the sharp sense of splendid malady which gave to Love such a touching face the evening of the ephemeras and the last examination. "Strange: it is necessary for me to go away and become a stranger to my own life in order to recognize myself. Even when I want to meet Guglielmo I have to carry myself back to a time now lost for us, or invent situations which are by now impossible between us. Here, then, is real life: falsity, accredited by habitude. And the one who prevails firmer in this wrong which is done to the soul, is the more virtuous."

She raised herself on her elbows in a cold shiver and tried to refute the thought as if she could turn her back on it for ever. But she felt it in her back, heavily, and her back seemed to her the perfect spot of mortification. "We begin to age from our backs," she said, "not from our wrinkles."

In this moment appeared before her, preserved from complete oblivion, the figure of her husband in a far-away night. He had come home from a banquet given in honor of a friend who was leaving for America. He was sitting near the bed and taking off his shoes. Without raising himself and hardly alleviating a heavy gesture, with a face that seemed suddenly aged: "Ah, he. . ." And the hand, moved to trace a great arc, fell heavily back.

With the dry and hurting voice which women usually have who remain alone in the house, Celeste had remarked from the throne of cushions on which she was leaning her arms:

"I did not think you cared so much for him. . . . You always talked of him in a certain way—After all, you are a sentimentalist."

After so many years now, with a start that brought her, feeble and shivering, out of the old habit of thoughts that were dry and dead like the husk of a cicada, she found the meaning: "Ah, he . . . he leaves, he wanted to say; for him freedom, adventure; hence, still youth. While I . . . a family, so much work to keep her well: a life set out rigidly, without escape. . . ."

The monotony of this plaint rained on the image of Guglielmo and wiped it out. In fact, the feeling of his face was for Celeste like the brightness of the mirror, awakened from obscurity among the sleeping things. By now she felt that she could understand only the things: the typewriter, the automobile, the train, the telephone. . . .

She also sees women around him. Courageous, they carry at their pulses, their fingers, a little bit of gold to catch the short-lived and burning light which strangely whips their faces, insert themselves exactly into the most incalculable and unexpected recesses of time. But they are not women. They are pieces of mosaic. All too ready, they give the impression of figurines sitting between doors which open and close, waiting for precise signals like that of a bell.

Oh, here: a keyboard of bells near Guglielmo; far, near, others feeble. He stands before them, commands them all. Celeste believes now she can discern many of them and imagines that the silence of the night dreams again each tinkling, holding its acute tremor, and exults about it. "That is why just before daybreak, the minutes precipitate as if with a spasm." And, with a sigh, "The world is full of love." But she defends herself against her smile because she wants to orient herself in her husband's life, tempted to suffer.

"With so much distributed attention he has lost sight. All that traffic induced by mechanical movements, ringing of bells and grinding of wheels have robbed him of his sight which is the revealed intimacy of each creature. It has made him like a mirror, susceptible in every point to reflex; it has made him also capable of special lies which, integrated and perfectly oiled, go their regular course because of which it is impossible to discern and reject them. For the veritable good of confidence which renews itself inexhaustibly, he has substituted the dignity of force, an efficient assurance which resembles the straight way."

Only on that far-away evening, shocked by the departure of that friend which was like the snapping of a photo in a land far in every sense, the soul who had suddenly found the threshold of the eyes, had escaped him, inexpertly adventuring with the fanaticism of a butterfly



over the ocean, to demand intimacy.

While he undressed, awkward and bending over, with one shoe in hand, without even the slightest sign that had showed he was conscious of himself, he had knocked with his eyes at her heart, exposing, insistently and without knowing it, a half-forgotten face, old, from which all the brightness which simulates youth, had fallen away.

A memory passes through her, the image of a sick kitten as it drags itself to the platter of milk. Before beginning to drink, after the agony of that creeping across, arrived at the goal of the platter, exhausted, it had given her an intensive look, more precise than words and yet not to be understood; it had succeeded and in finding and squandering the wonderful force of this look.

She swallowed tears and saliva: "Guglielmo," she said in a whisper; then, without voice. "It is true—you are right, I have understood nothing about you." She slipped under the covers and pressed near to him. "But it is never too late to reform and begin again. By dint of prayers I shall recall God's attention and obtain this complicity, this favor which is called grace.

"What a tortuous way I have trod to reach you, and how many things I have accounted for this night. Like a sleepwalker have I wandered over abysses of rose color. Now I am coming out of the fog and, measuring the risk I have run, I am afraid. Help me. Help me. I reasoned like a sot who thinks he is more intelligent when he is drunk.

"What a terrible thing. In infinity where the soul and body understand each other, suddenly appears a great lack like a stupor. And something new is born: a fraud in guise of cupidity, of folly, of vibrant laughter which flatters in an acute and complete way: for at that point a woman is like a tree which the wind finds in the same instant in each leaf. Then, all exposed and communicative, she exalts herself. She seems to be custodian of an extraordinary virtue, made of risk and therefore heroic. And she errs when she complacently thinks of herself as at the opposite pole of avarice: for who dissipates gives to nobody but the own self.

"You don't know what a woman is, of what perilous and fragile substance her force is made. Nobody knows it and I cannot tell you but in this very moment; for shortly the day will confuse me and falling back into the intrigue of life I shall not know how to defend me."

The idea of abandoning herself to a full, humiliating confession without remedy, inebriated her. By force of the moving truth she had finally opposed herself to the exigent and frenetic silence of the night. Now she felt near to touching Truth which surely fought within herself like a small demon. Now she reached it: her blood rose suddenly, whipped by a menace and a promise of shame. ("You don't know what a woman is.") And in this rising of her blood was extreme truth which brought her near sparkling fulfillment.

Guglielmo turned brusquely away and said, dryly:  
"You cannot even sleep in this house."

\* \* \*

For a long time, Celeste retained her breath. All rigid in body, it was as if she retreated with her blood. And as she retired towards a different, dead clarity, she lost color and life.

She succeeded finally in asking herself, quiet and icy: "In this house? Why in 'this' house? As if it were not his, ours. Oh, we hardly know each other in this house which I keep going with effort on the rounds of his schedules and his manias."

She thought she had dried forever the tears which just a moment ago, running rapidly, had oiled every word. Instead, as she sees herself again nearing him to ask his forgiveness (but it was not herself, a little girl takes her place; indeed, somebody is holding her hand, somebody whom he cannot recognize, not even see because she is so small and so afraid), tears inundate her face that seem to be prepared by infinite night watches. They fill her mouth, rain on her ears and expand on the shirt. Finally, a great relaxation which prolongs her sighs, puts a pause between thoughts, stretches her out and puts her on the way to sleep.

With a deep sigh, a big knot inside her breast dissolves. Slowly she throws her head back following the trajectory of a remembered gesture; she repeats with her head the movement with which the man who says her name like a color and with his voice touches the veins where they are bluest, lifts a little glass of anisette, imperceptibly winking. He is sitting on the stool in front of the bar, during the intermission of the concert. He looks at her maliciously, because a few days before he had said he detested anisette; and now, with the glass near his lips, he wants to show her in which yielding and gay manner he would know how to keep her company.

Next Sunday, in the intermission of the concert, she will ask him for a glass of strong liqueur, of the kind he likes.

She wants to smile. A very sweet pain chains her mouth, a pain which is at the same time a bitter dreg of tears and a sense of dissolution. More than a pain, it is a destruction which presses her jaws, strings her behind the neck and gives her the impression of a languid fall.

"Next Sunday . . . but where is the fan? I see it open on Concetta's breast: she is young now like she herself was at that time."

To take it away from her, she approaches a fence which rejects her lifting her big hat from her forehead. What a naked and weak face. But her breasts are stronger than her: hurting, they press against the fence and force it open; and slowly moving, as if blind, they help her to distinguish and move forward.

Here, she has her fan back. She opens it and leans a face that has

grown lean with contracted will, against her heart. Nice, really. It is the face with which, Sunday, she will excite and surprise the man who looks at her so much. "How many days to Sunday? Maybe four, maybe two: no—six. Really, six? Let's count them. My God, what confusion. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday . . ." and she continued: "Celeste, Celeste, Celeste. . . ." In her sleep she bent her elbows and her knees to defend that little bit of blue of her veins.

—Translated by EMILY SCHLOSSBERGER

## Salvatore Quasimodo

### TWO POEMS

#### ON THE BRANCHES OF THE WILLOWS

And how were we to sing  
with the alien foot upon our heart,  
among the dead abandoned in the squares  
on the ice-hard grass, with the lament  
of the little boys' lamb, with the black cry  
of the mother that met her son  
crucified on the telegraph-pole.  
On the branches of the willows, as a prayer,  
our lyres were hung up also,  
and they swayed, light in the unhappy wind.

#### JANUARY 19, 1944

I read you an ancient's gentle verses,  
and the words born among the vines,  
the tents, on the banks of rivers in the lands  
of the East, how mournful they resound  
and desolate in this deep wartime  
night, in which no one scours  
the heaven of the angels of death,  
and the wind is heard with the rumble of collapse  
if it shakes the iron plates that up here  
separate the loggias, and a melancholy  
rises from the howling dogs from the orchards  
at the rifle-shots on the rounds  
through the deserted streets. Someone lives.



Perhaps someone lives. But we, here,  
enclosed in the listening to the ancient voice,  
look for some sign that overcomes this life,  
the black magic of the earth where  
even among the tombs of the slaughter  
the hateful grass raises its flower.

—Translated by WILLIAM FENSE WEAVER

## Libero de Libero

### TWO POEMS

#### CICADA

Summer,  
the plain's vehement season.  
The cicada will have none of the forest;  
on a stone there is the bewailing  
of a long heat wave.  
I surrender myself to the hostile earth  
that in the light takes umbrage;  
the eye has already lost its sky.  
Sleep is more submissive than water is  
in the meadow's veins.  
Don't tell me that the sea is there  
where my thought sees only an idle desert  
and digs for its thirst  
a grotto, and moored at the shore  
ships revive a memory of wind.  
Futile nets enmesh the sun  
in an arid place. A sparrow escaping from a boy's hand  
resembles the morning.

#### RETURN TO PATRICA

To me comes back the autumn of the house  
like a woodland closing in around its walls;  
in the motherland of cruel memories  
the spider's coat-of-arms is above the door.  
Acrid in the dark smells the banquet of the years  
and, as a toast is drunk, a shadowy form  
stays a hand that in daylight abided dear.  
On the cushions lie familiar faces  
and around them there are many chairs

that sleep like nuns. In a mirror's dawn,  
perennially there, an ancient sea of rooms  
pursues me and time that's past is written on a sphere.  
An awning is still tilting with flowers  
between the winds of sleep; the game  
begins again of stairs in flight.

—Translated by FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP

## LITERARY INTELLIGENCE

Samuel Putnam

### A BRAZILIAN LETTER

The literary-artistic scene in Rio de Janeiro at the present time, like the socio-political one, is marked by a high degree of complexity, considerable intensity, and no little confusion. When I say "at the present time," I am referring to the winter and spring months (our summer and fall) of 1946. The qualification is important for the reason that things are changing so rapidly—everything is more or less in a state of flux—and here as in the political realm one has the feeling that anything may happen.

The explanation lies in the sudden though not unexpected collapse of the Vargas dictatorship; the abolition of the oppressive censorship that was exerted by the DIP (Department of Press and Information); the fresh glamor acquired for a while by Luis Carlos Prestes, the Communist leader, and the movement that he represents; the aftermath of the war and the general trend of world events; etc. Add to all this the vastly increased difficulties of daily living for the writer or artist, whose life was hard enough to begin with; a practically uncontrolled inflation and black market; a shortage and frequently an absolute lack of foodstuffs (including bread) and other necessities; and finally, a government that resembles the Truman administration in that it apparently does not know where it is going and meanwhile contents itself with doing nothing—put all these factors together and you have a situation in which the intellectual is only too likely to lose his bearings and, abandoning the task of creation, devote himself to one for which he has little aptitude, that of politics.

This, in brief, is what has been happening in Brazil for some time past. Animated by a deep resentment of those politicians and intellectual spokesmen who had gone along with Vargas and the DIP, many Brazilian writers, painters, musicians have followed the example set them by the French and have espoused a doctrinaire Marxism as the way out, while others have lined up with the liberal-democratic UDN (Democratic National Union). As a result, with leading novelists such as Jorge Amado, José Américo de Almeida, and Amando Fontes and a scholarly essayist like Gilberto Freyre in the Chamber or the Cabinet, the

quality of political oratory has greatly improved but literature has suffered. In place of writing, Graciliano Ramos—his *Angustia* was recently published in English translation under the title of *Anguish*—is to be found editing a Communist Party organ; Carlos Drummond de Andrade, one of the finest of Latin American poets, is busied with meetings; the same is true of the novelist, Marquês Rebelo; etc., etc.

The inevitable consequence of it all is one of the most barren seasons in recent years, from the literary point of view; and I speak as a professional bibliographer whose job for the past decade has been to inspect closely the annual output from Brazilian publishing houses. I had noted the falling-off before going to Rio this year (1946), but having arrived upon the scene, I began to understand it better. To tell the truth, I was forcefully reminded of our own country in the mid-depression days, just about exactly ten years ago, when every one—remember?—was trying to write a “proletarian” novel or paint a picture for the working class; and having witnessed the speedy end here of the “band wagon rush,” I was inclined to be skeptical and could not help wondering how long it would last with the Cariocas and the Paulistas.

As a matter of fact, even as I write this, late in the autumn, there are signs that the exodus of writers and other intellectuals from the Communist ranks has begun, one of the latest instances being that of Drummond de Andrade. It is a common thing these days to bring up the name of some one who has been with Prestes and be greeted with the laconic statement: “já deixou” (he’s already out). This does not mean, necessarily, a retreat to the ivory tower. Drummond de Andrade is at the moment very much occupied with the new García Lorca Institute which he was largely instrumental in founding; and there is, I have discovered, a general tendency toward a democratic-socialist position which leads many to align themselves with the Esquerda Democrática, or Democratic Left, an offshoot of the UDN.

For anyone with a good knowledge of the Brazilian variety of Portuguese who would see just what effect this excessive preoccupation with politics has had upon one of the best of Latin American story tellers, I might recommend Amado’s *Seara Vermelha*, which has just been published and which is by way of being a CP tract.

It would be wrong, however, to leave the impression that the Leftists, of one sort or another, have the field to themselves. Intellectual life in Rio, in the present period, is as I have hinted very intense, and there are numerous groups, schools, and coteries—“*igrejinhas*,” or chapels, as they are called in drawing-room conversation. Most important of the movements opposing the Left is that of the Catholics, led by the Neo-Thomist critic, Alceu Amoroso Lima (“Tristão de Ataíde”), whose influence, comparable to that of Maritain among the French, radiates from his lecture room in the Faculdade de Filosofia of the University of Brazil to the smallest of provincial towns, where student centers named in his honor will be found.

If Amoroso Lima’s influence is so great, it is for the reason that he is by all odds Brazil’s best critic and comes near to being her only one. As a Communist intellectual of São Paulo observed: “He at least has a *Weltanschauung*, whether you agree with it or not, which shapes his criticism; and that is something that the others lack.” Coming from a Marxist, this is significant. Alvaro Lins is another whose reputation is growing rapidly, and whom Amoroso Lima approves; but he and Sérgio Milliet, who is sometimes referred to, not very accurately, as “the Brazilian Gide,” remain literary essayists rather than critics. Milliet, influenced in the past by such Frenchmen as Gide and Péguy, is leaning just now somewhat uncertainly to the Left.

Amoroso Lima’s two latest volumes, *Estética Literária* and *O Crítico Lite-*

rário, afford a summary of his aesthetic creed, the theory behind his practice as a critic. They should be well worth doing into English, if a North American publisher could be persuaded to take a chance on them, a prospect that is not very bright. When I broached the subject not long ago to the head of a New York house, his reply was: "And who in America is interested in aesthetics?" Perhaps he is right. Who is? But it seems to me that some of the Catholic firms might profitably investigate the matter.

All in all, it is the Catholic writers of Brazil who are carrying on the great tradition while the others are attending meetings and writing political manifestoes. In this group will be found the Neo-Thomist, Neo-Bergsonian poets Jorge de Lima and Murilo Mendes and the novelist Lúcio Cardoso, who has been compared sometimes to Julien Green and sometimes to William Faulkner. One of the greatest, most authentically national poets that his country has produced (he is a mulatto and his themes are often drawn from the life of the Brazilian Negro), Jorge de Lima is bringing out soon a new collection of his verse with a preface by Gilberto Freyre. At the same time, he is winning a reputation as painter and sculptor, his volume of drawings, *A Pintura em Pânico* (Painting in Panic) showing a strong influence of Max Ernst and the Surrealists. (The bond between the young Catholics and the Surrealists would appear to be Rimbaud.)

A point that should be stressed in connection with the Brazilian Neo-Thomists is that their social and political outlook, like that of Maritain, is liberal, democratic, anti-fascist. Many of them, while profoundly anti-communist, are inclined to a form of Christian socialism, and here the teachings of the Franciscans and Dominicans are having a palpable effect. The Jesuits, on the other hand, are more inclined to the Right.

Somewhere between the Marxians and the Catholics, though apparently drawing nearer all the time to the latter, stands the unclassifiable and utterly unpredictable Gilberto Freyre, whose classic sociological treatise, *Casa Grande & Senzala*, is now available to English language readers as *The Masters and the Slaves*. When *Casa Grande* first appeared in the early thirties, the Catholic Right demanded that book and author be burned at the stake, but the Jesuits are now to be heard defending them both. Some months ago, Freyre, who devotes most of his attention these days to the Chamber of Deputies, delivered a lecture in Sao Paulo in which he compared politics to the art of the dance: either you know how to dance or you don't; "for politics is art, it is the dance, it is rhythm. . . ." A theory, if you look at it closely enough, that is as old as Aristotle; but it created something of a sensation, nevertheless.

The Paulistas, by the way, who gave Brazil its modernist movement of the 1920's, are still active; and my friend, Oswald de Andrade, who as a playboy of letters always reminded me of the Spanish Ramón Gómez de la Serna, is reviving the "Anthropophagite" school of which he was the founder, based upon a cannibalistic interpretation of history, with which, weirdly enough, he mixes a little Earl Browder and the forgotten gospel of Teheran. In the meantime, he is publishing, volume by volume, a serious and impressive long historical novel, *Marco Zero*.

Such in general is the Brazilian literary scene as 1946 draws to a close. It is a season, as they say down here, of "*vacas magras*" (lean cows), and the outstanding works are few. I should like to mention Manuel Bandeira's new study of Brazilian poetry, *Apresentação da Poesia Brasileira*; the collection of José Lins do Rêgo's Argentine lectures, *Conferências no Prata*, which contains a number of interesting papers on the Brazilian novel; and *Ranger de Dentes* by the Amazonian novelist, Allyrio M. Wanderley, who perhaps better than any other expresses the spiritual torment of his young countrymen. In this latter regard one should not forget Octávio de Faria and his ambitious novelistic sequence, *Tragédia*



*Burguesa*, reflective of the Catholic view.

With the native product in good part lacking, Brazilians are making large use of importations, and where it used to be France to which they turned, it is now the United States and to a certain extent England, both of which countries are engaged in an intensive and more or less concerted cultural drive. The French are making a strenuous effort to recover their hegemony, but they appear to be losing out, and English has now become the *chic* language; it is a required subject in schools and is widely taught in classes conducted by the Instituto Brasil-Estados Unidos and the Cultura Inglesa. American movies, needless to say, have had a ponderable linguistic effect; but a more important factor has been the growing strength and impressiveness of our North American literature in Brazilian eyes. Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Caldwell, Farrell—all are well known and their work is followed with a great deal of interest; indeed, their influence is held by some to be detrimental to the development of a national narrative art. The Anglo-American Eliot holds an appeal for the young Catholics; and during the past season there has been a strangely belated discovery of such midwest writers as Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg, and Vachel Lindsay. The excellent Sunday literary supplement, *Letras e Arte*, put out by the *Correio da Manhã*, is especially noteworthy for its attention to the North American theme.

It is, however, in the theater that a true invasion from the north is to be witnessed. Eugene O'Neill is quite as prominent in Rio de Janeiro as he is in New York. The fact is: he comes near to being the Brazilian theater of the present moment. His *Desire Under the Elms* and *Anna Christie* both are playing here, and earlier in the season a splendid version of his *Emperor Jones* was put on by the Negro Experimental Theater—which unfortunately, after a most auspicious beginning, had to suspend production due to race prejudice on the part of an isolated individual, the manager of the house. (Such cases are rare in Brazil, but they do occur now and then and never fail to evoke a sharp protest from the public and the press.) While it lasted, the Negro Experimental Theater brought forward a fine actor in Aguinaldo Camargo, of whom more will undoubtedly be heard. As for the other O'Neill productions, they were creditable ones but marred at the end by a sentimental tampering with the original text. Brazilian audiences liked all the pieces, finding them “*muito fortes*” (very strong).

Outside of O'Neill, the theatrical scene even more—far more—than the literary one is a barren waste in the neighborhood of Rio. For one reason or another, Brazil has never been able to evolve a theater of her own and seems to be as far from it as ever today. She has the actors—a Procópio, a Dulcina, a Suzana Negri—but not the playwrights; neither the playwrights nor the directors. The result is that a talented actor like Procópio is reduced to performing in a bit of imported hokum such as Louis Verneuil's *Jalousie*.

This absence of a theater is hard to understand in view of the dramatic character of Brazil's national problem: why is it that none of her writers has put that problem into the form of a drama?

If we turn to the domain of the plastic arts, what we encounter is a one man show, more or less: Candido Portinari. This is not to say that there are not other Brazilian painters deserving the attention of the outside world; there are at least half a dozen first-rate ones; but Portinari's stature is such that he tends to dwarf his contemporaries. He is not only a great painter, he is the most Brazilian of them all, so Brazilian that he blends into the mosaics of the pavements and the walls of the houses until he becomes as much a part of the landscape as the Pao de Açúcar or the Corcovado Christ. In painting as in the theater Brazil has been rather surprisingly backward, in view of the wealth of tropical color that she possesses (possibly, there has been too much picturesqueness), and with

the exception of certain pleasing regional landscapists, particularly of the north-east, she has not had a great deal to show until recent years. It is not unnatural, then, that the first artist to win international acclaim should to a large extent monopolize things.

Portinari is literally all over the place. You will find him in the pavement and murals of the new Ministry of Education building; you will come upon him in the little chapel on the Alto da Boa Vista of Tijuca; and the other evening I found one of his largest and finest canvases in the Rio mansion of a Pernambucan *fazendeiro*, where it hung between two colonial altar paintings—and was perfectly at home in that setting. All of which lends weight to the thesis that Portinari is in reality a painter in the *classic* Brazilian tradition.

It is not merely his artistic influence that is felt; it is his personal example as well. Some months back, having received a membership card in the Communist Party from the hands of Luis Carlos Prestes himself, Portinari went to Paris, where at present writing he is having a much talked of exhibition and is fraternizing with Picasso. He is, perhaps, the acquisition of which the Communists are proudest, and there can be no doubt that he has swayed others, writers as well as painters, in the same direction.

I have said that Portinari is not the only one—there is the venerable Lasar Segall, now become a hermit (an embittered one, some say) in his Sao Paulo studio. There are Guignard and Ismailovich; there are José Pancetti and the south-Brazilian painter, Iberé Camargo, both of whom had interesting shows during the past few months. But Portinari is “the show,” in the theatrical sense.

It was decidedly a show which he and the architect Oscar Niemeyer put on when between them they built and decorated the now famous “church” of Pampulha, in Belo Horizonte, news of which has doubtless reached the States. When the edifice was completed, the archbishop refused to consecrate it, declaring that it was better suited for a museum of modern art—and that is what it has become. From the outside the structure resembles an airplane hangar with signal-tower attached, or a fisherman’s shack—it is built beside the water—much more nearly than it does a shrine. On the inside, it is Portinari at his most modern, revealing what is, it may be, a new and provocative stage of his art marked by a breaking up of line and a fresh synthesis in the achievement of a neo-late-Byzantine effect. In any event, it certainly “provoked” the ecclesiastical authorities, who cried out that the sanctuary was being desecrated by a Communist.

The whole affair seems somehow to sum up and symbolize the cultural life of Brazil at this confused and fleeting hour.

Vivienne Koch

## "CULTURE" AND THE LITTLE MAGAZINE\*

I am conscious that in reviewing this volume here I am doing so largely for readers who are already aware of the career and role of the little magazine in the cultural history of America. Nevertheless, even the most *au courant* of my readers will find much in *The Little Magazine* that they have not known before, although they will sometimes wish that they might have been leaning over the

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\* *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography*. By Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich. Princeton University Press. \$3.75.

authors' shoulders to give friendly suggestions on matters which they know more intimately as participants in the making of little magazine history.

It is important, then, to recognize what some reviewers have not, that it was not the intention of the authors of this unique collaboration in cultural history to write: (a) a sociology of the American writer; (b) a primarily in-group or partisan evaluation of the little magazine or even (c) an account of the sociology of literary taste in this century. On the contrary, the authors have very modestly but very explicitly limited their function to that of compiling the neglected materials relating to the little magazine as "an important source of information about twentieth century writing" and "to give the subject as a whole—to all of the magazines—an order and pattern which will help us discover them and learn the special value of each." If we are going to raise questions about the value of this book, then, it had better be done on the terms on which it was written.

Looked at this way, the slightly over-sanguine tone of the authors will be seen, not as a compensation for their own insecurity as to the significance of their subject matter, but rather as an awareness of the very limited recognition this whole field has been given in the world of letters and scholarship generally. The authors are trying, and not at all viciously, to "sell" the value of the little magazines to those who hold the power-switches in culture and scholarship. If, at times, like enthusiastic but naive salesmen they recommend a good product for the wrong reasons, this is an understandable fault. For one thing, anyone who has attempted to wade through the massive welter of little magazine publications in English from 1910 to the present will know what sheer quantitative heroism and drudgery is involved in the task. Moreover, such an experience shows up the genuine complexity of the patterns to be unravelled from the data. The overlapping of orientations, the shifts (frequently irresponsible and personal) in editorial policy, the lag (sometimes fortunate) between program and practice, all dramatize the many difficulties inherent in making order from these unsorted materials. It is true, however, that while recognizing these difficulties, the authors have not always been able to resolve them. Nevertheless, it is clear that along with the first-rate and highly inclusive critical bibliography compiled by two of the authors (Caroline Ulrich and Frederick Hoffman) this study of the little magazine is the pioneering work on the subject from which all future research in the field will have to take, if not direction, at least guidance. As a matter of fact, apart from its invaluable assistance to the literary scholar, the book, merely on the statistical, factual level, will be a useful source for future extra-literary social and historical studies. I know of no other place where one can find assembled so much information regarding the costs, policies, circulation, personnel, contributors, fees, make-up, etc., of the little magazines.

Approximately one half of *The Little Magazine* is devoted to its history and the remaining half to its bibliography, and while I have no quarrel with this scheme (particularly since the excellent critical notes of the bibliography supplement the text itself), there appears to be a shift in emphasis between the two which is not altogether legitimate. For while the text deals almost exclusively with the American little magazine, both natively-grounded and expatriate, with only a casual mention of a few English names in the concluding chapter, the bibliography deals with both English and American publications, a practice which tends to obscure the outlines of the book as primarily a study of American cultural history.

This is not the occasion to discuss a theory of history, but it may be mentioned in passing that history can be written in various ways. The way the Messrs. Hoffman and Allen (the co-writers of the actual text) have chosen is that of a kind of mingled social-literary history and historiography. The para-



doxical relations between literary history and the history of literature are, in this study, not always kept clearly in view; it is just possible that, given the materials, it was not always feasible to do so. In their mode, however, the authors have, for the most part, done a workman-like and thoughtful job. To attempt to separate the various tendencies which the little mags followed—regionalism, eclecticism, politicalism, various psychoanalytical positions, etc., is, perhaps, the best way to see the little magazines, even very erratically oriented ones, as being crucially related to the meaningful cultural patterns of their times. For while it is true that the little magazines exist peripherally, “on the margins of culture,” as the authors say, it is important to distinguish the quality of this marginal activity. It might be more accurate to say that they exist on the margins of our *economy* and that, considering this marginal mode of surviving, they reveal a surprisingly central function in making or sustaining whatever true “culture” we have in a tragically split kitsch-culture society. This, ideally at least, should be the function of the little magazine. Why this ideality of purpose (to which almost all little magazines give at least lip-service) is accomplished only by a few of them is a subject I shall want to discuss in another connection.

To return to a consideration of the approach by means of which the manifold data of the little magazines is organized, it must be noted that on the purely quantitative side alone the authors have tackled a job which does not lend itself to summary treatment. For to deal with major issues in twentieth century culture like surrealism, Futurism, quantum physics, to mention only a few, means, perforce, that the issues as they have bearing on the little magazine have to be oversimplified, or even worse, merely listed. For example, the flat statement “Quantum physics has also cast its shadow on the thinking of the recent symbolist” is not very helpful either to those who wish to understand quantum physics or those who seek to understand symbolist poetry. I, for one, would give anything to see some lines of symbolist poetry which refract this shadow. In addition, the bareness of the comment suggests quite falsely that “thinking” in poetry has something to do with “thinking” in physics. It is no doubt the very ambitiousness of the attempt to *place* the little magazines in appropriate ideological settings that creates the expedients employed in explication. Often, however, the expository material is excellent and highly suggestive; this is true of the section on the influence of Freud on the literature of the twenties particularly as reflected in some of the expatriate magazines like *transition* and *The Little Review* (then in exile). There is also a popular but eminently sensible discussion of Imagism and other more recent poetic movements, as well as an attempt to resolve some of the contradictory notions generated by conflict in poetic theory and practise.

While I should not wish to underwrite all of the author's specific literary judgments (I am thinking especially of their classification of *The Seven Arts* as “the spiritual heir of *The Smart Set*”; of their consistent under-estimation of the work of William Carlos Williams; of their assignment of too much space to a dull, eulogistic chronicle of the affairs of *The Midland*; of their attribution of *transition's* twaddle about the supernatural and “divine currents” to a “lack of urbanity” rather than to a lack of intelligence; of their failure to distinguish between the distinguished record of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* in its first two decades from its inglorious shabby gentility in the last, etc.), nevertheless, the fact that they have risked making judgments at all on so many, and on such great and little matters, is certainly better than the “neutral” statistical treatment which might have satisfied less ambitious compilers.

But what is important is not that the authors of this excellent study have missed up on fine points here and there, that they have sometimes seemed to be unaware of the political stratagems employed by little mags to kick up some gold-dust for themselves, but rather that they recognize so fully the potentials of



the little magazine as a forum (often poorly led, it is true) where ideals, values and works get a hearing that they do not ordinarily get elsewhere. This recognition emerges with particular clarity in the chapter on the history of modern poetry, and the experimental freedom made possible by the little magazine is seen, quite properly as having provided the liberating climate for advance.

Yet it is true that a study of this sort confers a kind of respectability on the little magazines which might, theoretically at least, be not without dangers. But (and I hope the analogy is not taken for insolence) it is the same kind of "respectability" which is conferred upon the *practice* of poaching by an historical study of the institution. No, I do not think we need fear that the little magazines will wrap themselves in the legal garments provided by *The Little Magazine*.

For the truth of the matter is (and this is a point the authors of this book do not bring up at all) that there is already a kind of voluntary reformism going on within the little magazines themselves which may bring with it an inevitable decline in their unique and privileged function: that is to say, their function as the conscience of the corrupt society on whose margins they are allowed to "survive," and whose infectious ills they will at some stage or other contract. After all, the little magazine can only be so much better than the corrupt social structure where it finds precarious lodgment on the fringes. Thus, we have now been witnessing for some time the theoretically paradoxical phenomenon of the avant-garde magazines running collaborative "prize contests" with big commercial publishing houses which later publish the prize-winning pieces (here the magazine serves as clearing house or reading service for the publisher); there is also the growing practice of making collections or anthologies of pieces from these journals under the subsidization (and restrictions) of commercial firms. There is the increasingly ironic habit with which "avant-garde" writers publish one month in *Mademoiselle* or *The New Yorker* and in little mag A or B the next. It would seem impossible to satisfy the demands of both media simultaneously. And, if it is possible to do so, then there is something wrong with the little magazines and they serve the purest anachronistic ritual. In other instances, the production belt rolls right from the little magazine editorial offices into those of the publishing houses, often effecting a sort of inter-locking directorate, with the little magazines serving as training grounds for editorial personnel as well.

This may be optimistically taken by some to mean that the little magazine is not nearly so powerless as the romantic fiction about its role would have it. But, it is precisely in proportion to its collaborative powerfulness with large commercial institutions (whether publishing houses or universities) that the historical function of the little magazine will tend to disappear. While its economic marginality may grow less precarious, it will have an ever-diminishing peripherality of influence in determining the free and non-mass-consumption values possible to its times. Thus, it is necessary for the little magazine to choose the most self-conscious, ascetic and voluntary economic *powerlessness* if it is to continue to exercise that meaningful dynamic of change in cultural taste and value which is its sole charter and justification.

# ANTHOLOGY

Norman Macleod

## MY TREE'S THIN SORROW

A poison that bubbles around the bone's socket  
Rises like sap through the starched marrow  
And spreads its eagle scarecrow arms to drip  
Claws of blood from black malignant fingers.

My tree's thin sorrow from the flaw is fatal  
Wounding like a rose its white fleshed structure  
To bloom within the brain and through the eyes  
To shed the perilous perfume of its lustre.

Man sick, or thorned the genealogical branch,  
A maleficent eye at the root of its telescope  
Congenital to the cold universe or the past  
The view rising through the poisoned iris last.

The burning twin orbs in death's endorsement  
That now index the strychnine of the stars.

Donald Weeks

## ARCHAEOLOGY OF LOG

The axe in cedar sinks on rose and fragrance.  
The heart is opened. With sound of crinkle the tissue  
tears, and dark as gum, like honey made  
from blood, the bloody tears of cedar issue.

Along the cellulose of heart I see  
the sear of axe, the burn of metal like a sheen  
of rose, and O the dust that dries the air  
is sharp as petal in the tomb unsealed, unseen.

Maurice Lindsay

MADRIGAL, FOR JOY

When Summer's slipped beneath the turning seas  
again, and the long, high boughs are bare,  
moist, scarlet strawberries no longer burning  
on sandy earth, and the pale carnation's flare  
of incense crushed upon the pointed grass,  
oh, I will wear this gentle season's ease  
against whatever griefs may come to pass!

When Time's thick sluice-gates block my surging blood  
into a deep, reflective echoing pool,  
desire's young sting dissolves its desperate urging,  
oh, then these hands that often held the cool  
white curve of your breasts, sailed on their rise and fall  
as love's bright waters gathered to a flood,  
shall feel their pulses in the calm waves' call.

When Aspiration's golden candles melt,  
spilling their shifting petals on spent years,  
and from his lulling knees Death idly dandles  
my still-receptive body, tears or fears  
will never give false comfort to my side,  
for Earth's warm, sensuous embrace I shall have felt  
cover me like a full, far-distant tide.

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**T**HE QRL takes pleasure in announcing this important issue. The new translations of the prose and poetry of Paul Valéry, in addition to the original French, make available some of the works of the writer T. S. Eliot calls our most representative poet. To add significance to this issue, the QRL will include critical essays—many concerned directly with the translated material—which will produce an integrity in the entire issue. Translators and essayists presented, among others, will be

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## NOTES (continued)

Florence, Italy. American writers interested in seeing their works translated into or reviewed in Italian are asked to send copies of their volumes to Mr. Luigi Berti, co-editor of *Insommaria*, Via La Farina 9, Florence, Italy. ITALO SVEVO'S masterpiece will be reprinted in its English translation under the title of *The Confessions of Zeno* by Mr. James Laughlin's New Directions press as the first volume of the new collection "Modern Reader Series." UGO GALLUZZI is one of the great artists of Italy. FRANCES FRENAYE is the American translator of Ignazio Silone. SOPHIE MERRILL OTIS is the widow of Judge Otis of Kansas City, Missouri. WARREN RAMSAY, a young American poet, is now studying and teaching at Yale. DR. FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP, a fine poet, is Director of the Frick Collection in New York. "Black Panthers" is an example of a new literary form in Italy, established by EMILIO CECCHI, called "Gold Fishes" from the title of one of his collections. SALVATORE CASTIGLIONE, translator of Croce, is an instructor at Yale. We wish to apologize for not publishing more poems by GIUSEPPE UNGARETTI and for omitting work by TOMMASO LANDOLFI: space considerations would not allow their inclusion. Translation of a story by ALBERTO MORAVIA, one of the best writers in Italy, arrived too late to be included in this issue. WILLIAM FENSE WEAVER is now teaching at the University of Virginia. MICHELE VACCARIELLO is an instructor at Williams College. Now in Washington, MAURICE ENGLISH was head of the Italian section of the OWI. "Old Story" by GLANNA MANZINI was written especially for the *Briarcliff Quarterly*. EMILY SCHLOSS-BERGER is an editor of the Nebraska University Press. SAMUEL PUTNAM is an authority on the literature of Brazil. VIVIENNE KOCH was guest editor of our William Carlos Williams issue (no. 11). Assistant professor of English, DONALD WEEKS is faculty advisor of *Pacific*, published at Mills College. MAURICE LINDSAY edited the selected poems of *Norman Macleod*, to be published shortly by William Maclellan (Glasgow, Scotland).

NORMAN MACLEOD



The *Briarcliff Quarterly* is an international review devoted to the publication and interpretation of contemporary literary and cultural expression in the form of fiction, essays in criticism, poems, and book notices.

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